LA V[illegible]

BY MADAME DE GENLIS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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LA V

IF repentance and scruples rendered the life of Madame de la Valliere unhappy, the passion of love still more effectually contributed to destroy her repose. Although she was always passionately beloved by the king, yet affairs of state prevented him from dedicating every moment of his time to her, which could alone satisfy a heart given up to him without reserve. The slightest appearance of neglect, or inattention on his part, continually operated to distress her. She experienced the chagrin of feeling them with bitterness, and of resenting them with keenness. The

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is was determined to put
at the head of his army; she
anticipated, with anguish, the dangers to which he would be thus exposed: what contributed also, to add to her present distress, was a fatal presentiment of misfortunes, which she was to suffer.

A new subject of alarm, yet more dreadful than all the others, completely overwhelmed her mind. The great Condé, who had become the most sincere friend of the king, recounted to him, one day, with horror, in presence of the duchess, that there had been found, at Auxerre, fixed on a post, the portrait of Henry IV. transfixed with a poniard: he added, that, upon

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upon this same post, there was an abominable inscription in Latin, which threatened Lewis with the same fate. "What consoles me," said the king, "is, that nothing of this kind has ever been attempted against insignificant kings*." This admirable reply, may, of itself, furnish an idea of the lofty mind of this prince, of his heroic courage and magnanimity.

This relation, given by the great Condé, which inspired in the mind of the king, such a sublime sentiment, affected the duchess with the most extravagant and tormenting inquietude: she was penetrated with terror to think there existed, in all France, and especially in a city so near to Paris, a villain capable of assassinating the king. Had

* These were his own words. Memoirs of Madame de Motteville.

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not this monster accomplices; might he not form a conspiracy; had not this execrable plot been already settled? In a word, the king went but so frequently unattended, and was so accessible, as to render any attempt of this kind easy of execution. These dismal ideas unceasingly tormented her; they mingled with all her thoughts during the day, and disturbed her sleep during the night. Frequently was she roused from sleep by frightful dreams, which represented Lewis under the hands of assassins:—even the morning did not always dissipate these fatal illusions; by dwelling on which, her mind became so enervated, as to make her regard every foolish dream as a presage of misfortune: thus it is, that the absurd and indeterminate fears of sensibility, so readily give rise to superstition!—In minds ill at ease, every

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thing which appears striking is construed into a fore-warning from heaven!

When the duchess sent to the king, she waited the return of the messenger with an agitation and a tremor, the violence of which seemed to increase every minute: if, during this interval, she heard any extraordinary noise in the streets; if, while standing at her window, she accidentally perceived any commotion among the people, or a crowd proceeding towards the chateau; such circumstances were considered by her as a confirmation of some terrible misfortune! . . . These shocks frequently deprived her of the use of her senses. . . . If any one brought her a billet from the king, she melted into tears; she thanked heaven as if she had received a piece of intelligence, as unlooked for as fortunate. She resolved that, at least, for the future, she would no

longer construe these foolish fears into presentiments; and when she saw the king, she flattered herself she was for ever freed from her terrors; but, on being left alone, they immediately returned. Lewis was never made acquainted with these circumstances; Madame de la Valliere would have blushed to display in his presence so much weakness; he never knew to what an excess he was beloved.

It is natural that females should be more tender and more unfortunate than men, in all their affections, even the most legitimate:—as wives, as mothers, what have they not to suffer! Providence, in separating the two sexes, has placed on one side courage and dangers, and on the other, by a necessary consequence, fears, inquietude, and sorrow!—He who must expose himself to every kind of danger should possess a heart more firm,

and

and less tender: but it is necessary that the being whom he protects and defends be prompt to take alarm, and tremble for his safety: that she should view, with terror and dread, all the dangers which he braves and encounters for her sake: even her weakness is the guarantee of her gratitude:—these serve to increase her admiration and her attachment. She is timid and fearful, often trembling at mere chimeras,—but her love is augmented in proportion to her terrors!

So many shocks and violent agitations produced such an evident alteration in the health of Madame de la Valliere, that Lewis, in his turn, experienced the most lively uneasiness, and privately consulted his first physician respecting her situation. He was of opinion, that a purer air would be productive of be-

nefit, and that she should proceed immediately to Saint Germain. Madame de la Valliere had here a separate house, with a large garden, bordering on the forest. She was passionately attached to the country; it afforded her great pleasure to cultivate flowers, and particularly, as a remnant of former happiness, to cherish, in the midst of the court, the amusements which were so dear to her early years. One evening, towards the end of autumn, she was alone in her garden; the season was serene and tranquil, and the air balmy. The duchess sat down in the midst of a parterre of oranges, situated on an elevated terrace: she overlooked the forest of Saint Germain, which she perceived in the distance. This view wounded her heart, by producing a lively recollection of the superb woods which, in the same manner,

over-

overtopped a part of the chateau de la Valliere! She threw her eyes upon the flowering shrubs with which she was surrounded, and this enchanting scene excited in her mind a vague and undefinable sentiment, composed of a variety of different sensations, of confused regrets, and an emotion of anxiety!—Despoiled of her innocence, she no more experienced that delicious calm, of which she had formerly tasted the charm, in admiring the beauties of nature: agitation and inquietude mingle themselves in all the sentiments of a wandering heart, which can no more enjoy repose, because it is no more under control!—The eyes of the duchess were turned towards the heavens: in contemplating the beautiful spectacle of a fine setting sun, her soul expanded towards the Creator of the universe. Soon, however, a sadness overclouded

her mind, and rendered painful to her, even this sentiment of religion.—"Eternal Being!" cried she, "thou canst see, in my adoration of thee, only a horrible inconsistency, and a profanation in my homage! Thou oughtest, even now, to inspire me with a fear of thy terrible judgments; nevertheless, this weak and trembling heart finds always pleasure in pouring itself out before thee! I experience the satisfaction of neither doubting thy existence, nor thy omnipotence! But thou hast not wholly abandoned me; thou repliest to me; yes, I still recognise thy severe and terrible voice!---It moves and overwhelms me!---I hear it with dismay, and yet I wish to understand it!---Bowed down in thy sight, I experience, without ceasing, the necessity of presenting myself before thee; of offering up my tears, my useless lamentations,

lamentations, and of humbling myself in thy presence! Though not wholly thine, my heart is still drawn towards thee! Alas! It is no longer thee, whom I seek in solitude; yet, when alone, thou art constantly present with me!---Unworthy to serve thee, I dare still invoke thee; and I call upon thy name, although I deserve, from thee, only just punishments!----Come, inflict on me thy chastisements, but do not hide thy face from me!---O! deign always to speak to me! I love thy reproaches better than thy silence!——"

In saying these words, the duchess dried up the tears which flowed gently from her eyes: those which are shed from piety, even by the guilty, are never bitter. When the day began to close, she arose; and, after walking half an hour, entered a long arbour, covered with honey-

suckle:

suckle: she reposed on a verdant bank, heedless of the approach of night.

Having learned this day that a monk had, during the morning, been soliciting charity at the court, for a village destroyed by fire, she requested one of her friends to send this monk to her in the evening. He came at eight o'clock; it was completely dark; the moon alone illuminated the garden, but its rays could not penetrate the thick foliage beneath which she was sitting. A valet-de-chambre, who accompanied the monk, announced him on his introduction into the arbour. The duchess, who wanted to interrogate him, bade the valet-de-chambre give him fifty louis on his departure. The valet, after having received this order, left her alone with the monk, who kept the most profound silence. Madame

dame de la Valliere arose, and, walking slowly towards the parterre, —"My Father," said she, "the most affecting account has been given me of the disaster which has befallen this village, and I wish to visit it." She waited for an answer, and not receiving any,—"I request you, my Father," resumed she, "to inform me which is the most deserving family in this village; the money which will be given you, on departing hence, is for the unfortunate inhabitants in general; but, besides, I wish to take one of these families under my especial protection." . . . At these words, the duchess heard the monk sigh, but she obtained no answer. "What!" said she, "do you fear to entrust me with the fate of these unfortunate people? . . . . Do you fear to commit young female orphans to my charge? . . . I have no right to be offended at this distrust,

distrust, but it is ill-founded. . . . . . My Father, I will conceal my name from them, and place the children in colleges and convents." . . . . Here the duchess paused; the monk groaned inwardly, he wept, but made no reply. The night, the darkness, these stifled groans, this extraordinary silence, all served to make an impression on the duchess, and to produce a kind of terror which her reason could not overcome. Faint and trembling, she had nevertheless strength to quicken her pace. The monk followed her. She heard him behind her, and hurried her course, as if anxious to fly from him. At last, emerging from the dark arbour, the sight of her house, and the unclouded light of the moon, dispelled her fears. She stopped, turned back, and beheld, standing before her, the monk, immoveable, with his arms across his breast,

breast, his eyes cast down, and his face bedewed with tears! She looked at him attentively, and shuddered. She beheld before her the venerable father Anselmo! The holy monk, who had been the friend of her infancy, and the guide of her early years—he who had given her so much pious advice—he who had received the last sighs of her mother! . . . . —all these recollections wholly overpowered her——she clasped her hands together with a suppliant air, and, falling upon a seat of green turf, shed a torrent of tears. "O, my Father!" cried she, "God will pardon me, I am so wretched!" . . . "Yes," at last, said the venerable old man,—"such a soul ought to return to HIM!" . . . . . On pronouncing these words, he hurried off, and disappeared.

Early on the following morning, Madame

Madame de la Valliere stepped into her carriage, and proceeded to the village, situated about two leagues from St. Germain. Her attendants were clothed in grey habits, without livery, and they had orders to conceal her name. She had procured the address of the most unfortunate family in the village; father Anselmo had left it the evening before, with the valet who had given him the fifty louis.

The feeling heart of Madame de la Valliere was wounded on entering this village, which presented only a heap of ruins. "Alas!" said she, "the flames which could not here destroy any of the master-pieces of art, or the monuments of pride, have produced misfortunes more real and affecting; the wretched inhabitants have not here to deplore the destruction of such brilliant baubles, which a frivolous vanity accumulates in the palaces

palaces of the great, but they have to deplore the loss of the very essentials of life!—Here the fire consumed no vain objects of luxury; it devoured only those of utility, the hard-earned rewards of labour!....O! how much are these unfortunate people to be pitied; so courageous, so moderate in their desires, so easily satisfied in good fortune! their tears never flowed for imaginary misfortunes. When they complain, it is because they suffer evils, the bare image of which alone would make us tremble! When they weep, they fall under them, they die! .... May misfortune overtake the flinty heart, which can remain unmoved at the sight of such accumulated distress!"—In making these reflections Madame de la Valliere walked through the village; the house which she sought was situated at the extremity of the principal street; it belonged

belonged to a farm, on which, eight days before, its inhabitants lived in affluence; but the fire had destroyed their granary, their barn, the grain itself, the cattle, and even their clothes: nothing remained but a large heap of broken furniture. The family before her consisted of an old man of eighty, his daughter, a son-in-law, and eight children almost naked, the eldest of which was only twelve years old. The walls, blackened by the smoke, and the joists of the ceiling, injured by the fire, witnessed the trouble it must have cost this unfortunate family to preserve even this remaining shelter! . . . The attention of Madame de la Valliere, on entering the chamber, was called from the unfortunate objects before her by the appearance of a young female, of the most dazzling beauty, who delivered to the farmer a large parcel of clothes, and this unknown beauty appeared

peared surprised at beholding a person so distinguished as the duchess; they regarded each other with the sweetest expression of benevolence and sensibility; after which the unknown lady retired;—the duchess wished to know her name, but they were ignorant of it. Madame de la Valliere approached the old man, who appeared buried in extreme grief, and inquired what might be the value of the property he had lost by the fire; seeing nothing in this question beyond simple curiosity, he replied, in a dry tone, without regarding the duchess, *about eight thousand francs.* "What!" replied she, "here are a hundred louis, besides which two thousand crowns shall be sent to you, in the morning." The effect produced by these few words was inexpressible; the old man joined his trembling hands, and two big drops flowed down his venerable

cheeks;

cheeks; the farmer, full of satisfaction, regarded his benefactress, not daring to paint his gratitude, because he had no language in which to express it; his wife, transported by the most tender feeling of our nature, cried out, " Come, my children, I can now embrace you with joy! .... This worthy mother had, for the last eight days, experienced only pain from the caresses of her children, until benevolence had restored to her all the blessings of maternal love. After having enjoyed this delicious scene, the duchess put several questions to her respecting the children, the consequence of which was, that she took upon herself the care of the two eldest. She departed, loaded with the blessings of this happy family, after having passed one of the most delightful mornings of her life.

The health of Madame de la Valliere being re-established, they left Saint Germain,

Germain, and returned to Versailles, about the end of September: the love of the king continued equally violent, but the duchess preserved a profound melancholy, which wounded him to the soul; he thought love should have overcome all her scruples; he became jealous of her sadness, and his vanity was secretly irritated; her pensive character, however, of which he complained, tended to render his passion still more permanent.

Madame de la Valliere, possessing greater sensibility than most other females, might have been the happiest of mothers, but her extreme tenderness for her children was, in her mind, a sentiment not more pleasing than her love. The eldest of her children, Mademoiselle de Blois, who was in her fifth year, already gave the promise of that singular beauty, which, for a long time, rendered her the admiration of the court. The king, who adored

adored this child, endeavoured to discover for her a proper preceptress; he proposed to the duchess several ladies of the court, who appeared capable of fulfilling this important office, and pressing her to make a selection. "Alas!" said she, "it is necessary to give to this beloved daughter an instructress, who will be able, by her lessons and her example, to render me odious in the eyes of my child! such will be the fruit of a virtuous education!" This heart-rending reflection, which was but too true, displeased the king equally as a father and a lover. He combated it by all the sophisms of love. Madame de la Valliere replied not, but she did not change her opinion. These melancholy ideas were painfully renewed, particularly in the moment when she gave herself up to the effusions of maternal tenderness. "What," she

she would say, " must I dread that which forms the most pleasing hope of all other mothers! I must dread the period when reason enlightens my children, for then they will be able to judge of my conduct. In the ordidary course of things, time throws a veil over the weakness of criminal women. Their children may be kept ignorant of what it would be desirable to conceal from them, or at least it may always be denied: But the name of him who has ruined me, will perpetuate, from age to age, the remembrance of my errors; his glory will eternize my shame. The sacred name of mother is an opprobrium to me—My daughter, this child so dear to me, what will she think of her mother, when she has received the instruction of religion, and meditated on that sublime morality, she will reflect on my life and her birth!—And in the sequel, what counsel can I offer her

for the guidance of her youth? How can I speak to her of duties of virtue. The endearing name of mother, when illegitimate, appears to me an usurpation, as unfortunate as dishonourable, since it gives not those rights which the same title bestows on virtuous women."

While Madame de la Valliere, thus justly, but rigorously, condemned herself, a more indulgent public admired the novel spectacle of a favourite living in solitude, never interfering in public affairs, and exhibiting the most perfect disinterestedness. She who, in such a situation, was denominated *l'humble Violette**, was, doubtless, no ordinary woman. She was beloved by the people, and, notwithstanding her weakness, she interested every sensible and virtuous heart: but it was not at court that these

* By Madame de Sevigné.

judgments

judgments were passed. To be without ambition, is regarded there as a proof of inferiority of talent and want of genius. It is a virtue out of place, and cannot be honoured there. What is called esteem at court, is the consideration acquired, not by the sterile friendship of the prince, but the power and inclination to serve or injure others. The duchess of la Valliere, despising wealth and intrigue, asked for nothing. Concealing herself, and existing only for the king and her children, she devoted to them every moment of her life, and appeared to the courtiers, as a person who sunk below her situation. Her mildness and good nature augmented the boldness of her enemies. Envy could accomplish every thing against a woman who was incapable of vengeance, or even of complaining. Her extreme moderation dis-

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pleased her friends, and they testified indifference towards her, because they despaired of being able to employ her credit in forwarding their views of ambition. She had, however, done them important services in more than once soliciting offices for them: but, persons in favour, are subject to a strange misfortune: whatever they do for their friends, is regarded only as an engagement to perform much more.

In this singular commerce, benefits, instead of acquitting the debts of friendship, serve to contract new ones. The duchess was unceasingly importuned and complained of by her friends. Her disinterestedness they called romantic folly; her dislike to intrigue, ridiculous indolence, and her moderation a system of dupery. Those who hated her, calumniated her without fear, and, consequently,

quently, without reserve. Those who wished to appear to love her, were almost always dissatisfied with her conduct, and defended her weakly. The rest of the court loved her not. A mistress, retired and inaccessible, who gave no entertainments, and played no conspicuous part, could not fail to displease them. Thus this interesting woman, so unfortunate in her affections, as well as her faults, found no consolation, except in the idea, that the affections of the king were unalterable. She was far from foreseeing the new torments which she was soon to experience!.....

About this time appeared at court Athenais de Mortemar, Marchioness de Montespan. Every one was dazzled by the brilliancy of her person, and charmed by her graces, her vivacity, and the embellishments of her mind. Lauzun, who was inti-

mately connected with her family, spoke to Madame de la Valliere, in terms of the highest praise, of her character, her conduct, and her sentiments; and impressed her strongly with the desire of seeing her.

The duchess went one evening to the queen's card party, knowing that the Marchioness de Montespan would be there. The marchioness had, on her part, the strongest curiosity to see the person, who, for seven years, had completely engaged the heart of the king. The result of this first interview was a discovery, which produced a somewhat interesting scene. The surprise of Madame de la Valliere was extreme, when she recognized, in Madame de Montespan, the lady she had seen in the cottage of the burnt village. The marchioness shewed equal astonishment when she saw Madame de la Valliere: they approached

approached each other, and spoke mysteriously, with an air of tender interest. This made some of the company ask questions, respecting their previous acquaintance. The duchess remained silent; but Madame de Montespan related, in detail, and in the most agreeable manner, an adventure, which she was well pleased should be known, and which furnished a very natural pretext for connecting herself with the favourite. That connexion, she knew, would afford frequent opportunities of seeing the king, which, at court, is considered an inestimable advantage, even by those who have not great views of ambition. The marchioness spoke, with enthusiasm, of the benevolent disposition of Madame de la Valliere, of whose conduct, in that respect, she knew all the details. Having a country house, near the burnt village,

she had learned, from the peasants, all the particularities of the action of the *unknown lady*. The duchess was affected by eulogies, bestowed with sensibility by so charming a lady. She imagined that she perceived, in her, a soul similar to her own, and from that moment she loved her. The marchioness well knew how to take advantage of this first impression, and next day she went to Madame de la Valliere's, who received her with open arms. The closest intimacy immediately took place between them. In this connexion the duchess displayed all the frankness of her character, all the sensibility of her soul, and Madame de Montespan all the seductive charms of her wit and manners.

Madame de Montespan, then twenty-two, joined to regularity of features, to perfection of shape and beauty,

beauty, all the bloom of youth. Her countenance was animated and interesting. Her mental powers were neither extensive nor solid, but her wit was original and brilliant. A lively, ingenious, and sarcastic turn, gave to her conversation a sort of striking singularity, particularly at court. She knew how to vary her epigramatic tone. Sometimes it was serious, and resembled reasoning; but more frequently an amiable gaiety served to excuse its malignity. Her extreme vivacity gave her the air of frankness; for, by many, imprudence is considered as a pledge of sincerity. Madame de Montespan neither knew how to govern nor how to restrain herself; but she was capable of assuming, without effort, all sorts of forms.— She had practised this art early, and it had become less an artifice than a habit. She possessed, too, great means

of pleasing and obtaining success in the world. Her character was false, but her wit was natural. Though incapable of a tender and lasting sentiment, nobody was more susceptible of enthusiasm. She loved with all the extravagance of outrageous passion, or she loved not at all. Those who did not produce a derangement of her understanding, never could please her. If she was not entirely subjected to the influence of others, no empire could be maintained over her. If her inflamed imagination cooled for a moment, she passed suddenly from admiration, and intoxicating passion, to indifference, aversion, and disgust. She manifested all the spirit which springs from ambition, prejudice, and pride, and not from elevation of soul. Having no idea of real grandeur, she mistook vain shew and pomp for glory. Every thing

thing brilliant, every thing conspicuous, was, in her eyes, great. Her designs were profound, but her motives were puerile. At once insatiable and frivolous in her desires, she wished to command; not that she might direct and govern, but merely that she might have the appearance of doing so. She wished for aggrandizement, only that she might attract and fix the attention of all upon herself. Finally, though free from avarice, she was eager for riches, in order that she might distribute money, without choice and without discernment.— She gave away as she acquired, merely for the display of magnificence. She appeared so passionately fond of Madame de la Valliere, that she soon obtained, from her, the most tender friendship, and all her confidence.— The duchess opened her whole soul to her. She acquainted her with her

scruples, her remorse, her melancholy, and with that profound sentiment, that love, which augmented in the midst of so many pains and sacrifices, and which she could neither surmount nor moderate! Madame de Montespan pitied her, and, in particular, praised her repentance. She acknowledged, with the greatest delicacy, that she herself never could be happy in yielding to a passion, which excited so much self-reproach.

"Alas!" said Madame de la Valliere, "if I could tear myself from him without exciting his despair, I perhaps still should have the courage!—But to afflict him, to lacerate his heart, to empoison the remainder of his life, in return for so much love, care, and constancy!—No:—I never can have that inhuman resolution!" hearing language of this kind, Madame de Montespan used to appear

to

to fall into a kind of reverie, from which she recovered only to lament the lot of her friend! She was the first person belonging to the court, who, without combating the remorse of Madame de la Valliere, appeared to understand it. The duchess esteemed her the more. She thought she recognized in her the principles and the courage of Madame de Themine, and said to herself, "I have at last found even here a real friend!"—Madame de Montespan became every day more necessary to her. At first she saw her only privately, and almost always alone. Afterwards, in order to see her more frequently, she proposed that she should be introduced into the king's private parties. Lauzun joined in prepossessing the king in her favour, and Lewis, when he knew her, soon subscribed to all the praises bestowed upon her. Madame de la Valliere,

Valliere, who was always afraid lest the king should not be sufficiently entertained at her parties, perceived, with pleasure, that the conversation and sallies of Madame de Montespan amused him. She candidly thanked her friend for the pains she took to please the king; and Madame de Montespan, being instructed beforehand by the confidential conversation of the duchess, was perfectly acquainted with the taste, character, and opinions of Lewis. This was an advantage of which she profited with great art. Under the appearance of levity, sometimes carried to the greatest extravagance, she flattered him in a thousand indirect ways, without its being possible for him to suppose that she did so by design. She expressed opinions which coincided with his, and sentiments which interested him. —Always varying, but always inge-

nious, she still preserved, at all times, that moderation and delicacy which can alone give grace to gaiety. All these seductive powers, joined to the charms of a ravishing figure, produced the effect she expected.

The friends of Mademoiselle de la Valliere, the duchess de St. Aignan, and the Marchioness de Sourdis, saw not, without jealousy, the intimacy of her connexion with Madame de Montespan. The duchess knew their selfishness and ambition. She easily discovered their real motives, and this penetration made her blind to the truth of the information they gave her. They hinted to her, that this new friend, so young and so brilliant, who had a foolish husband, whom she despised and openly ridiculed, might become a dangerous rival.—This idea appeared to the duchess an atrocious calumny. It appeared an attempt,

attempt to blacken the character of the king, and her reliance on his sentiments was not to be shaken. She rejected their disagreeable advice with disdain and indignation: the consequence was, that these old friends forsook her, and joined her enemies.—Madame de Montespan now became more dear to her. Happy to have the opportunity of enjoying a legitimate sentiment, her friendship was unbounded. She wished the Marchioness to have an apartment in her house, in order that they might spend two or three whole days of the week together. These marks of attachment, however, began to prove embarrassing to Madame de Montespan. Her plans were formed, and every thing seconded their execution: Madame attracted her to her parties, and Lewis was now more frequently a visitor there. At these parties he constantly

stantly heard Madame de Montespan praised. Her beauty, her amiable character, her wit, became alternately the subject of eulogium. No opportunities of exhibiting her to the best advantage were allowed to escape. Nothing ensures the success of a fine woman so much as the general acknowledgment of her charms. Confidence, thus secured, adds to her graces by producing a sort of tranquillity which resembles gentleness, and even modesty. To employ with ease all one's means of pleasing, it is necessary to have a reliance on a favourable prepossession. Much cannot be obtained without risking a little: but what do we hazard, when we know that nothing will be judged rigorously, and that every thing that can be approved, will receive universal applause? The timid and the modest see in society none but imposing observers,

observers, and enlightened and severe judges: But the confident, flattered by their self-love, never suppose they meet with any but inferiors and admirers. If they have sufficient address to conceal this opinion, what advantage must they not have over others?

The king regarded the object of so much eulogium, with astonishment. Madame de Montespan, was, in all respects, so different from Madame de la Valliere, that, to acknowledge her charms, seemed a sort of infidelity. It was impossible still to love the one, and admire the other, with enthusiasm. Lauzun, and the Duke of Langueville, seconded, with all their power, the designs of Madame de Montespan; the former from views of ambition, and the latter acting under the influence of a passion which he never had conquered. He yet loved

loved Madame de la Valliere, and his passion was much more powerful than the delicacy which ought to have induced him to renounce it.

Madame gave a masked ball, and among all the masks, the king sought only for Madame de Montespan; he discovered her, and soon recognized her. They removed from the crowd, and went into a detached cabinet. A long conversation terminated by a declaration of love from the king, and confession of similar sentiments on her part. A meeting was appointed for next day. Meanwhile the duchess, who was at home and alone, and who knew that the king and Madame de Montespan were at the ball, turned her thoughts on them with the most pleasing security. "I am certain," said she to herself, "that they will find out each other; they will talk together; and their conversation

versation will be all about me." She went to bed with this reflection, and her repose was peaceful. Love has no foresight: always deceitful, its confidence and its fears are equally unfounded. It agitates its votaries, when they might enjoy a few moments calm: it blinds them, when all it had promised is lost.

Intoxicated, however, as the king was, by his new attachment, and brilliant triumph, he was not free from remorse and uneasiness. All his sentiments for Madame de la Valliere were not extinguished. He no longer beheld in her those irresistible attractions which had charmed him; but still she was, in his eyes, the most interesting of women. Madame de Montespan knew how to remove his scruples. To be faithless, was not sufficient: in order to effect her purpose, it was necessary that she should be

be ungrateful also. But that she might not have the appearance of a character so odious, she did not hesitate to expatiate in the praise of the duchess; for she knew, that though esteem may fortify love, it cannot re-kindle it. Madame de Mostespan, in doing justice to the virtues of the duchess, insinuated, that she never had loved Lewis, since she still lamented her connexion. She asserted, that love never recollects its sacrifices, but to rejoice in having made them; that the heart, which felt an extreme passion, believed itself justified, and, indeed, was so, since it only yielded to an irresistible power. The king was easily persuaded to believe what he vehemently wished to be true; besides, he found in Madame de Montespan, all the excess of passion; and when he compared that violence with the mild sensibility of

Madame de la Valliere, he said to himself, that he was now loved for the first time. Love intoxicated him, but the passion did not as fervently penetrate his heart. Tumultuous transports leave only fugitive and confused ideas; but tenderness diffuses a charm over all its recollections! Lewis was confident, however, that Madame de la Valliere could not learn, without the greatest grief, his change of sentiment; and therefore wished to conceal from her his new intrigue. Madame de Montespan, who had also her reason for preserving appearances, was equally desirous that her connexion with the king should not be known; at least, for a time. They, therefore, conducted themselves very mysteriously, but, after all, the secret was only impenetrable to the duchess.

About this time, Philip IV. the queen's

queen's father, died. Lewis had pretensions to the inheritance of part of his dominions, and particularly to the Netherlands. War was determined on, and Lewis announced that he would go to Flanders, and put himself at the head of his army. What did the duchess feel on this intelligence? All the dangers, all the horrors of war presented themselves to her imagination; and the king was about to expose himself to them, and to brave them! How could she enjoy a moment's repose with so tormenting an idea; and how was she to banish it from her mind? Even the presence of him she loved, seemed to add to her torment. She could no longer look on him without experiencing an inexpressible agony of heart. Always affected by a painful melancholy when she saw him, and always haunted by the most dismal reflections

reflections when alone; she had not even the consolation of complaining: not that she wished to assume the appearance of a courage she did not possess; but there are some fears so terrible, that it is impossible to give expression to them. They present themselves to the mind as confused images, which cannot be removed, but on which the mind would not voluntarily rest; and by a kind of superstition from which even a good understanding cannot preserve sensible hearts; it seemed to the duchess, that to give vent to her unceasing inquietudes, would be to form sinister presages. She also wished to leave the king in the possession of all his courage, which she believed she might weaken were she to expose to him all her grief.

While she was thus constraining herself to appear calm, Madame de Montespan,

Montespan, when alone with the king, painted, energetically, her alarms. Her passionate speeches, torrents of tears, and frequent faintings, inspired the king with all the gratitude that a lover could experience. There was, however, a thousand times more tenderness and love in a single look of Madame de la Valliere, than in all these violent appearances. The language of the countenance is well understood when we love; and then no other is necessary; but, when we no longer love, all those expressive emotions, those eyes which before spoke so plainly, afford no information. They must be interrogated with a lively interest, if we wish to understand them. Indifference still perceives the beauty of a face, but no longer remarks the expression which constitutes all its charm. Madame de la Valliere's grief was too great to

permit her to observe the change in the king's conduct. She perceived, it is true, that he was often in a state of reverie,—that his mind seemed to be pre-occupied; but she was far from being uneasy on that account. She fancied his cold and constrained behaviour, was the result of the melancholy, which, notwithstanding his love of glory, he experienced at leaving her.

As soon as the season for military operations commenced, the king departed for Flanders. This event plunged the duchess de la Valliere, as well as the queen, into real distress. The latter, however, received consolations of every sort, but nothing mitigated the heart-rending sorrows of the former. The queen was honoured by her affliction; every heart took an interest in her sorrow, and public

public esteem diminished its poignancy. Such is the happiness attached to legitimate sentiments, that enjoyments are found even in the midst of the most painful afflictions that can spring from them: but how is grief to be supported when it is a subject of scandal; when it excites the sneers of the wicked and of prudes, and obtains, from the virtuous, only a humiliating compassion? The duchess constantly received couriers from the king, and letters from Lauzun, who related to her all the traits of Lewis's behaviour. They informed her, that at the trenches at Lille, the king exposed himself with great temerity: a page was killed behind him, and an old soldier took him roughly by the arm, saying, "*get away—is this your place?*" These details excited all the admiration of the duchess,

 but

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but, at the same time, raised her fears to the highest pitch.

It should seem, that poignant disquietude, and profound affliction, springing from the same cause, were capable of suspending the rivalship between two women formed to love each other. Hearts equally afflicted, approximate by a natural attraction, because they alone can understand each other. Hatred cannot exist between those who lament over the same evils. We recognize, with pleasure, on the countenance of others, the expression of 'the sorrow we feel within ourselves. How is it possible to resist the sympathy of misfortune?

The duchess frequently visited the queen. She had always loved that princess, who never entertained towards her that animosity which is commonly entertained against a preferred

ferred rival. The queen knew the gentle disposition and the generosity of Madame de la Valliere. She alone had a right to complain of her, and yet she truly estimated her character, to which all the ladies of the court refused to do justice. It was remarked, with surprise, that since the departure of the king, the queen seemed to receive, with more pleasure, the visits of Madame de la Valliere, and that even a kind of very strange understanding seemed to be established between them. If the king, or if the war was mentioned, they looked at each other with an extraordinary expression of sensibility. They had the appearance of condoling with each other on their reciprocal decay of health. When the queen received news from the army, the first thing she did was to make it known to the friends of Madame de la Valliere,

though she had, in general, no intercourse with them.

This conduct gave rise to a multitude of false conjectures. Courtiers discover, with wonderful facility, the artifices and designs of ambition; but the generous movements of extreme sensibility are to them inexplicable extravagances Their study of the human passions is confined to those which pride engenders. Less wicked, less unjust than ignorant, they do not intend to calumniate feeling hearts, but they misunderstand them.

One morning, when Madame de la Valliere expected news from the army, she was surprised to learn that no courier had arrived. She was informed that the queen was in a state of great anxiety, and she proceeded to the castle. This was an extraordinary proceeding, for she had never visited the queen in the morning, but she

she felt an irresistible desire to see her. The rank the duchess held at court gave her free access, but hitherto she had not profited of that privilege. She penetrated, without any obstacle, to the queen's chamber, where she saw nobody. She advanced softly and timidly towards the queen's oratory, the door of which was open*, there she found that princess alone, on her knees, and placed in such a manner, that she could not see any one enter. The duchess, greatly moved, stopped, and, for the first time, contemplated the queen with a sentiment of envy! "Doubtless," said she, "*it is for him* she implores heaven: how happy is she, her virtue gives her the right of praying with hope!" The queen heard a sigh and

* At this period, all the queens of Europe had oratories, or small chapels, in their apartments.

turning round, saw the duchess covered with tears: "My God!" exclaimed she, with terror, "have you heard any news?" "No, Madam," replied the duchess, in a voice half stifled with sighs, "but, like all the court, I am alarmed by the non-arrival of the courier." "In the situation in which I am," said the queen, "I see none with pleasure, except those who feel deeply interested in the dangers to which the king exposes himself." The queen pronounced these words with all the charm which mildness, indulgence, and bounty can give to virtue. Madame de la Valliere would, at this moment, have been capable of sacrificing her love to her. Hurried away by a tender and involuntary emotion, she threw herself on her knees, and seizing one of the queen's hands, pressed it to her heart. The queen, greatly affected,

affected, rose and embraced her. The duchess, in tears, cried, "Ah! Madam, dispose as you please of my unhappy life." She was about to proceed, and would, doubtless, have entered into a virtuous engagement, when the queen heard a noise in her apartment. The forms and prejudices of society are so often in opposition to really generous actions and goodness of heart, that the queen would have been extremely embarrassed, had she been found alone, and sharing her grief with Madame de la Valliere. She, therefore, quitted her precipitately, and the duchess, not daring to follow, remained alone in the oratory. She regarded, with a sort of qualm, this secret asylum of piety, and the place which the queen had occupied; the velvet cushion still sunk down, on which, at the foot of a crucifix, this virtuous princess had offered up

her prayers with so much fervour, for the safety of an unfaithful husband.

Nevertheless, the embarrassment of the duchess became extreme, on understanding that the queen's chamber was regularly resorted to by all the females of the court; she repented at not having attended the queen, for she could no longer leave the oratory, without producing extreme surprise; besides, so keen were her feelings, that she readily comprehended why her majesty had left her so suddenly. —"She was ashamed to display her goodness to me publicly" said she.— "Alas! I am in reality so criminal, that those who shew me any indulgence, can only do it in private, from the dread of losing their dignity, and being accused of weakness!" As she made this mournful reflection, she heard a great bustle in the apartment

of

of the queen, occasioned by the arrival of a courier from the army; then the hesitations of delicacy, the fear of exciting astonishment, all was forgotten; the duchess, beside herself, darted into the chamber, at the moment when the queen, after having glanced rapidly over a letter, exclaimed, "Flanders is entirely conquered, the war is finished, the king returns covered with glory!"...... At these words, all the ladies expressed their joy by their gestures, exclamations, and tears; the queen, transported, embraced them, with the exception of one alone!—In going round the circle, she passed the duchess with an air of severity, and even without honouring her with the slightest notice! Her inquietude was at an end; the king was returned, and she now saw in the duchess only a rival...... She had suffered her to partake of her

 grief,

grief, but joy in a rival is always offensive; we can grieve, but not rejoice with them. . . . . Every eye was turned towards the duchess; no one could conceive how she had so unexpectedly found her way from the oratory of the queen, into which none but favourites were permitted to enter; and the manner in which she was treated by her majesty, rendered this incident still more extraordinary.—She was regarded with a malevolent curiosity, which, on any other occasion, would have produced the most cruel embarrassment; but one thought alone occupied her attention; she continually repeated to herself—*the king returns victorious!* . . . This idea made her regardless of the wounds inflicted by hatred; it raised her above the malevolence of envy, abuse, and, in short, of fate itself. What cannot the mind brave, when suddenly relieved

lieved from a load of misery, and elevated to the summit of good fortune —when affection and self-love are equally gratified, and the most ardent vows of the heart fully accomplished? Madame de la Valliere, anxious to return home, where she was certain of finding a letter from the king, remained only a few minutes before she departed for the hotel de Biron; in order to reach her house, it was necessary to pass through the courts of the castle and part of the great avenue. The people, already informed of the happy news, abandoned themselves to all the transports of an immoderate joy; all the courts resounded with repeated cries of *long live the king!* Each of these shouts penetrated to the bottom of the duchess's heart. O! how just and well-founded did this general enthusiasm appear to her mind! How much this people,

people, impetuous in all their feelings, was amiable in her eyes! and with what delight does the lover become intoxicated with the glory of an adored object.

On her return home, the duchess found, as she expected, a billet from Lewis, in which he informed her he had written to the queen to join him at Amiens, and he invited her likewise to undertake this journey.—— This billet was short; but Madame de la Valliere was perfectly satisfied with it, so true is it that the mind is disposed to be pleased with every thing during the enjoyment of happiness.

She sent for Madame de Montespan, in order to talk to her of her joy: this lady waited on her, but remained only a short time, during which she appeared extremely agitated and absent; which, she said, proceeded from her

her being obliged to follow the queen, who had resolved to set out for Amiens next morning at day-break. Madame de la Valliere, in the mean time, made preparations for her journey; and, although she was not in the suite of the queen, she departed at the same hour in the morning. A sense of respect and decorum prevented her from advancing, and she found her carriage confounded, on the road, with those containing the attendants of the queen. This was a delightful journey to Madame de la Valliere. She represented to herself, the meeting she was about to have with the king, as the most happy moment of her life. She saw him free from the occupations of war, passionate, happy, devoted to her alone, and enjoying, more especially on her account, his success, and his glory: each of these thoughts caused

her

her heart to palpitate, and produced, in her mind an emotion she had never before experienced. As she was not only charitable, but even prodigal to the poor she met on the road, they all cried out, *Live the king! Live our good, our great king!* How much these cries interested her in their misfortunes! In listening to them, she bestowed her gifts on them with gratitude.

Notwithstanding their misfortunes, they call down blessings on their sovereign! "My friends," said she to them, whilst tears of delight flowed from her eyes, "love him always, pray for him, he labours for you, he feels for your pains, and will find a remedy for them." When she was thus speaking, she caused gold to be distributed among them in profusion. Joined to the most lively tenderness, she felt a pride in the king, which alone

alone was able to produce what is usually termed a violent passion.— This intoxication was kept up during the whole journey, by the acclamations of the people they met on the road. What harmony so enchanting as that of the union of every voice, celebrating, with ecstasy, an object we passionately love! How philanthropic! How good and sensible, in our eyes, are all those who participate in our delirium! How astonishing would it be to see any of the human species mourn! How delightful to be able to say: the object of all these honours, this hero, this adored sovereign, loves only me! I, alone, can add to the happiness of so much grandeur and glory! The blessings of these people, the admiration of Europe, may bestow on him renown, but it is I alone that can render him happy!—These ideas, this intoxication,

toxication, annihilated, during the whole journey, the regrets, the repentance, the remorse, which, until now, had mingled so much bitterness with a love as tender as it was constant: after so many alarms, a joy so sudden, and so lively, banished from her mind every painful recollection, and absorbed every other sentiment. She believed her passion to be fully justified by the glory of her lover. She enjoyed not only the glory he had already acquired, but anticipated his future fame. Her heart already bestowed on him the glorious title he afterwards received from the gratitude of his country. Love, on a single point alone, unfolded to her the future: perhaps it can only foresee what will dignify its object? Ah! it especially appertains to this passion to predict only success and triumphs!

When

When they were within a few leagues of Amiens, the duchess descried, from a rising ground, a part of the army, at a considerable distance: at this sight, prudence and reason abandoned her: she forgot every consideration of humanity, and was only capable of making a single calculation; by leaving the highway, and pursuing a cross road, she would behold the king some minutes sooner. She immediately ordered her postilions to take this road: they vainly represented to her, that it was nearly impracticable. "It is the best," said she, "since it is the shortest!"—— They set forward, in conformity to her desire, and found, as they expected, the way extremely dangerous; but, although the duchess was naturally very timid, nothing, at this moment, could appal her. She considered, in the danger of being overturned,

turned, only the misfortune of delay: any other danger appeared to her perfectly insignificant. Love gave to her, at once, courage and intrepidity. When dangers are encountered for a beloved object, we reckon so much on good fortune as to believe disaster impossible.

Notwithstanding the ruts, the stones, and the deep holes, the duchess continued to urge her postillions to advance with rapidity: they obeyed her; but the road appeared long: it separated her from Lewis! In the most violent agitation, with her head out at the coach door, and her face bathed in tears, she darted forward her eyes, although the ground, being flat, and interspersed with immense clusters of trees, intercepted the troops from her sight; but she knew they were approaching, and each step augmented her ardour and impatience.

"Let

" Let us go ! Let us see him !" cried she, " What will be his joy ! What will be my happiness !" In the midst of these delightful reveries, the carriage was suddenly overturned in a kind of ditch: the glasses were broken, and Madame de la Valliere received two deep wounds: the one in the chin, and the other in her right arm, which was also bruised by the fall. She, however, immediately gave orders to her people to raise up the carriage, which was quickly accomplished. Her arm, which was much swelled, gave her extreme pain. She supported it in a sling, and observed, " he will discover what I have suffered, in order to see him a little sooner !"...That he might not, however, be alarmed, she carefully endeavoured to stop the effusion of blood from her wounds: at the same time, casting her eyes upon the country, she

she uttered a piercing cry, she perceived the troops, she beheld the king!....The prince, on his part, recognised the carriage and liveries of Madame de la Valliere: he put his horse to the gallop, and, advancing towards the duchess, with astonishment, he approached the door of her carriage. "How then!" said he to her, "before the queen!"—This was his first exclamation: an exclamation of disapprobation of an eagerness, which was, doubtless, imprudent, but so tender!——a severe reproach upon so much love!—The duchess, as if thunder-struck, remained immoveable, chilled, annihilated, she preserved a profound silence; what could she say in her justification when it was *him* that condemned her!—The king was, however, much affected, on perceiving that she wore her arm in a sling; he

interrogated the duchess, who was not in a situation to reply, but her attendants explained to him in what manner it had happened: "Ah!" said the king, "when I was vexed at your arrival by this road, it was a presentiment of the pain which I experience!"—This compliment somewhat reanimated the duchess, but could not console her; there are occasions when nothing can repair the effect of a word rashly uttered: the lover can pardon, but not forget; a heart deeply wounded is never again completely restored; tenderness and sensibility may preserve from resentment, but not from suffering.—The king displayed the greatest sensibility, but it was too long delayed; all the chimeras of happiness had vanished: an illusion, too long cherished, was at last wholly dissipated.—This interview was short; Lewis was obliged

to

to continue his route, since the queen had arrived. He told Madame de la Valliere that, in order to procure her some repose, he should sleep at Amiens; at the word *repose*, the unfortunate duchess heaved a deep sigh; the king did not hear it, and went on. She experienced the most heart-rending grief on seeing him leave her at a full gallop, it seemed as if he had forsaken her for ever! She felt herself sinking, but followed him with her eyes: he did not once turn about! .....A thick cloud of dust soon concealed him from her sight; then ready to faint, she fell back upon her carriage: she was terrified at finding herself thus deserted; in vain did she endeavour to banish all painful reflections, one ruling passion took possession of her mind, and filled her imagination; a mournful voice continually resounded in her ears: "*He no*

longer

longer loves me!.....Like dreadful flashes of lightning, ideas darted into her mind, and gave her a glimpse of the frightful truth.....She recalled to mind the warnings she had contemned. New and saddening sensations increased her affliction; she could not weep; indignation dried up her tears!—The physical pain produced by the injury she had sustained, afforded a moral lesson still more distressing, by recalling to her mind its cause and consequences!.....No sooner had she arrived at Amiens, than the king, followed by a surgeon, entered her chamber. This attention, however, she attributed merely to the dictates of humanity and compassion. During the examination of her arm, Madame de Montespan came in suddenly, on which the duchess started, and immediately looked towards the king: his air and manner were embarrased.

—In running up to embrace the duchess, Madame de Montespan slightly grazed her arm, on which she pushed her back, saying; "Ah! keep off, you hurt me." . . . .

Madame de Montespan, whom nothing could disconcert, pretended to understand these words in the most obvious sense; but she would not sit down, because she was obliged, she said, to return immediately to the queen; she departed, and a few minutes afterwards the king left Madame de la Valliere, on being assured by the surgeon that the arm was neither fractured nor dislocated. A single doubt is often sufficient to dispel a long-cherished error. It opens our eyes, causes us to view it attentively, and we discover the truth. The intercourse between the king and Madame de Montespan appeared so evident to the duchess, especially on recalling

calling to mind various circumstances which seemed to her to confirm it, that she was astonished only at her past blindness. Her heart, however, still struggled against the conviction of her mind; she often repeated, *I have no positive proofs.* She was not, however, the less convinced of her misfortune: but it afforded her still a consolation to repeat that phrase. When her women undressed her, she was so oppressed both in body and mind, that she could neither move nor support herself. She allowed them to act, without either aiding or resisting them. When a mirror was presented to her, on casting her eyes upon the glass, she started on beholding the change in her countenance; and when, at the same time, she recollected the brilliant figure of Madame de Montespan, and compared herself to her rival, a sentiment of

humiliation filled her soul with grief. Notwithstanding her errors, such was the purity of her mind, that she never imagined her personal charms could attach the king; but now, though she blushed at her weakness, she lamented the loss of her beauty. She appeared to herself to be more changed than she was in reality; neither the extraordinary graces of her person, nor the exquisite beauty of her eyes and countenance, were at all impaired: but, with such superlative sensibility as she possessed, how could she preserve the vivid freshness of youth?

Notwithstanding her fatigue and dejection of mind, she did not experience a moment's repose during the night. On the following morning, however, her arm was nearly well, and she set out at the same time with the queen. What did she not suffer during

during this journey, which she had before performed in a situation so very different! Every thing which had then excited her joy and transports, now produced the most painful sensations, and plunged her into a dejection of spirits truly deplorable. Although she loved the king with greater ardour than ever, she experienced only an indefinable and painful sentiment, on hearing the people celebrate his exploits; she could not fail then to discover how much the most tender love is tinctured with egotism. These patriotic cries could no longer flatter and excite her self-love; they produced only in her a gloomy sensation, which almost bordered upon envy. Next to the inconstancy of a lover, that which ought to be most dreaded is to lose, before relinquishing our affections, all illusion respecting our own pro-

per sentiments; to be no longer able to deify that affection to which we have sacrificed every thing, and to discover weaknesses and personalities in an attachment which we believed so disinterested and so generous.—How much does her weakness appear imprudent and culpable! There remains to her neither consolation nor apology! Alas! it is only when we cease to be loved, that we can form an impartial judgment of ourselves. This depressing calamity always bereaves us of some portion of self-esteem—it destroys all illusion—all enchantment! . . .

It was late when they arrived at Versailles, and the duchess, without seeing any company, immediately shut herself up in her own house.—Madame de Montespan had related to the king, that the queen was greatly hurt that Madame de la Valliere had

had wished to see him before her.—Madame de Montespan did not fail to exaggerate very much the resentment of the queen. She described also, in very strong colours, the *indignation* of all the persons of the court. She pretended, as the natural apathy of the duchess (it was thus she termed her modesty) rendered her unsusceptible of enthusiasm, she had only committed that action with a view to insult the queen. Madame and Mademoiselle Montpensier, being personal enemies of the duchess, did not let slip such an opportunity of inveighing against her. They pretended that the queen, on observing her leave the high road, had, for a moment, entertained the idea of sending her guards to stop her; and that, afterwards, she had said, she saw clearly by the present insolence of Madame de la Valliere, that all the

humility which she had displayed during the absence of the king, had only proceeded from duplicity and baseness. Although all the ladies, who were in the carriage with the queen, had neglected nothing which could irritate her against the duchess, that princess had not used any of the expressions imputed to her; but the discourse was so often repeated, and so approved, that the queen, perhaps, flattered that it should be attributed to her, had not the frankness to disavow it, which necessarily compelled her to treat the duchess with more reserve than ever. It fell out precisely as they wished and expected.

The following morning, the duchess could not avoid receiving the visits of several persons who came with no other view than to inform her of these particulars. Benserade, who entertained for her a sincere friendship, and

and who had always conducted himself with fidelity towards her, while he dared not inform her of the treachery of Madame de Montespan, did not conceal from her the perfidy with which she had endeavoured to irritate the minds of the king and queen on this occasion. Madame de la Valliere sighed, suppressed her tears, and made no reply; her heart was too much wounded to discover her thoughts.

The king, immediately on his arrival, waited on the duchess, who became pale on finding herself with him alone, as if she dreaded an explanation: in fact, she found in his behaviour, a complete confirmation of her misfortune! The king's manner was cold and embarrassed; he began by telling her that he was oppressed by business, and could only remain a few minutes with her. Before his depar-

ture, he observed there would be a brilliant court in the evening, to compliment the queen on account of his return, and the conquest of Flanders; and he requested Madame de la Valliere would be also present on the occasion. Madame de la Valliere bowed obedience; she cast down her eyes, full of tears, and kept silence; she perceived that the king exacted this respectful step as a kind of reparation for the insult of which the queen complained. The king spoke on different subjects; and all at once, looking at his watch, left her hastily. The duchess remained in a state almost approaching stupidity; but, at last, summoning resolution, towards the evening, she went to the house of the queen. All the courts were illuminated; an immense crowd filled them; every thing announced happiness and joy; but this public rejoicing

ing appeared only to aggravate the misfortunes of the unfortunate duchess. She was received by the queen with the most repulsive gravity; and, following her example, all the other ladies assumed towards her an air of solemnity; for, in the great world, malevolence and disdain never appear in any other garb but that of a cold and ceremonious politeness. The duchess, penetrated with grief, feeble and yet suffering, did not experience all the embarrassment which they intended, since she was in a condition, neither to reflect nor observe; but she felt an inconvenience, and a depression of spirits, which made her anxiously desire to withdraw, as speedily as possible, from a state of such painful restraint. They were standing, and the queen, after having gone round the circle, leaned against a chimney-piece; whilst she

was thus waiting for the king, in order to commence the parties for play, she conversed with Madame Henrietta, the Princess Palatine, Madame de Soubise, and Madame de Montespan. Madame de la Valliere was at the other end of the saloon.—As the females around her, carried on a lively conversation among themselves, they did not address to her a single word, nor even appear to remark that she was present, although she was only a few paces distant from the place where they stood. Hardly able to support herself, pale and immoveable, with her eyes fixed on the door at which the king would enter, she waited with the utmost anxiety for his appearance; being determined immediately to withdraw. Suddenly, Madame de Montespan left the groupe which surrounded the queen, crossed the saloon with an air of triumph,

umph, and approached Madame de la Valliere.

She spoke to her with an air of interest, as if she had been touched with her solitary situation, and her embarrassment. This affectation of kindness roused the duchess from her reverie. Unable to endure the idea of being protected by Madame de Montespan, she received her with the most marked coldness. Madame de Montespan then said a few words, without being moved, in a tone of carelessness and levity, and afterwards went away. In a minute after the door opened, and the king appeared. He cast his eyes over the assembly: he saw, with a glance, all that was passing, and conjectured what had happened before. He saw Madame de la Valliere downcast, humiliated, and solitary! She was there only out of obedience to him!—At this mo-

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ment his natural equity, greatness of soul, and high spirit, supplied the place of that love which he no longer felt. He approached Madame de la Valliere, and spoke to her with an expression, which confounded all the observers. The first person he named, in forming his party of *hocca*, was the duchess; and, as he observed she was so agitated, that she could, with difficulty, cross the room, he made the table be moved to her, and sat himself down beside her. He did not call upon Madame de Montespan to join the party, and did not even once look at her during the whole evening. He made the duchess sit beside himself, and paid attention to no one but her. He said a thousand flattering things to her, with that delicacy and grace which was peculiar to himself. At first she thought his conduct proceeded only from that generosity

rosity she knew he possessed; but her heart soon deceived her: she gradually recovered hope, and almost all her happiness. We easily return to an error which is dear to us. In her mind, love had always been confounded with friendship; and when she saw the kind attentions of the king, she believed all his passion for her was returned. A short time before the party broke up, the king was informed, that the mob in the court yards were so boisterous and extravagant in their joy, that they had made bonfires of the sedan-chairs in waiting for the ladies, and that they were also burning the pannels and floorings intended for the great gallery. "Let them amuse themselves," said the king: "We can get more wood. I will not have their joy interrupted." This reply made tears flow from the eyes of Madame de la Valliere.

Valliere. Admiration renewed all her confidence. It seemed impossible that he, who shewed so much feeling and generosity—he, who appeared so sensible of all the soft delight of being loved, could be ungrateful to her.

When the game was ended, the king rose, and stood or walked about, for a few minutes. There was a striking expression of embarrasment and discontent, on the countenances of Madame de Montespan, and all the enemies of the duchess. The other personages crowded round Madame de la Valliere, who never displayed more simplicity, gentleness, and modesty. The queen, after the king had whispered a few words to her, approached Madame de la Valliere with an air of some constraint, but spoke to her with much kindness. The duchess considered that it was still the king who spoke to her; for it

it was easy to discover, that it was he who had prescribed this proceeding. Her feelings did not permit her to reply, except by a respectful inclination of the head, and a look full of expression. She departed, animated, and restored to life. Several of the courtiers were eager to escort her. On arriving at the bottom of the stair-case, her servants were called. "I hope," said she, "my chair is burnt;" and, indeed, so it was. While inquiry was making, Madame de Montespan arrived. She was alone, all the favourites of the king having surrounded her rival.—Her visage was sombre and agitated. Madame de la Valliere spoke to her, with a mild and serene air, and Madame de Montespan, endeavouring to assume a tone of civility, felicitated the duchess on her appearance, being now more cheerful than when she

came

came into the room. "Indeed!" replied she, with much simplicity, "I was then so full of anxiety! But I am not so now." At these words Madame de Montespan gave a malicious smile, which she intended should be remarked. She wished to excite doubt as to the favour shewn Madame de la Valliere; and, at the same time, to renew the uneasiness of her rival.

The duchess, however, was not alarmed, but, easily penetrating her design, she was much irritated. At this moment she was informed that her chair was burnt to ashes. "Ah! so much the better," said she, "we must go home on foot:" Lauzun and the Duke of Roquelaure offered to accompany her. The latter, who was to have supped at Madame de Montespan's, made an apology for not going home with her. "The reason is very plain," replied

plied she, ironically, " Madame de la Valliere requires more than one support, and I can do without any." " It is possible, Madame," said the duchess, " that I may want some support, but I have sought none." With these words she left her. When at home and alone, she reflected on all that had passed, and was confirmed in the pleasing opinion, that she had recovered all her power over the heart of Lewis; or rather, she persuaded herself that she never had lost it: but she preserved all her suspicions of Madame de Montespan. She had just seen an example of her malice, and she recollected a multitude of traits which proved her ambition and her falshood. This knowledge of her rival's character increased her confidence; it appeared to her impossible that the king should feel a strong passion for a person who was so unworthy

worthy of his esteem. She was, however, constrained to confess to herself, that Madame de Montespan had, for a moment, seduced the king; but she conceived that his transitory connexion had left no impression on his heart, except that of contempt for her who had, with so much artifice and perfidy, betrayed the confidence of friendship. She imagined that Madame de Montespan would never again dare to visit her, but she was deceived. Madame de Montespan, though enraged by the triumph which the duchess had obtained, felt that it was dangerous to shew her displeasure to the king. She perceived that Lewis wished that honour should always be paid to the object he had so much loved; and besides that, he still entertained for Madame de la Valliere an attachment which, in the eyes of others, might appear to be love. Finally

nally, she knew that she should never be able to prevail on the king to make a public declaration of his inconstancy, and to break with the duchess. Madame de Montespan, however, could not content herself with merely being the favourite in private. Her vanity made her ardently desire to occupy alone what, at court, was called the *place* of Madame de la Valliere. She considered that the duchess could not readily distinguish between love and friendship; that credulous and confident, she would look upon the less passionate attachment of the king merely as the effect of a long habit, and that so long as he should shew to her the same delicate attentions and tenderness, she would be satisfied, or at least would never complain. The passion of Madame de Montespan for the king was great, and it was increased to the highest pitch,

pitch, by the glory which his majesty had just acquired. No sentiment of honour was capable of repressing her ambition. She was sensible that all the world knew her weakness, and that the numerous enemies of Madame de la Valliere would not shew her so much respect, unless they hoped that she would entirely supplant her rival. She already knew the court sufficiently well to be certain that all her partizans would abandon her, if, after quarrelling with the duchess, she had not sufficient influence to procure her dismissal. But how was that to be accomplished, since Lewis was incapable of such cruelty; since it would even excite his indignation to propose it, and since the duchess would never be undeceived, but by the most formal and positive proofs? Madame de Montespan herself did not dare to declare the

the whole truth to the duchess, for fear of irritating the king. To have done so would have been to fail in all her promises, and to have grossly exposed her ambition. It appeared, therefore, necessary, that Madame de la Valliere should make the discovery by accident, or at least, that the circumstances should have that appearance to the king. This reflection suggested the idea of a stratagem, which was speedily carried into execution.

Madame de Montespan possessed some tablets, in which there were a portrait of the king, and two pages, in his majesty's hand-writing, strongly declaratory of his passion. She put them in her pocket, and went to visit the duchess. The latter, not expecting she would take such a step, had not given orders that she should not be admitted. It was, therefore, with

great surprise she saw her enter.— Madame de Montespan affected an embarrassment, which she did not feel, and appeared to desire an explanation, which the duchess refused.— The conversation was languishing and constrained, but the visit was pretty long; at last, Madame de Montespan rose, and went away with precipitation. A few minutes after, the duchess cast her eyes to the place where Madame de Montespan had sat, and perceived the tablets lying open, on the chair, in such a manner that the portrait of the king was distinctly seen. She remained for a moment motionless, with her eyes fixed on that object. She took up the tablets with a trembling hand, convinced that they had not been lost, but that they had been left there intentionally. She knew the writing of the king, and proceeded to read it with the greatest

agitation.

agitation. The first page was written three months before his journey to Amiens, and the second after his return. Thus, in a moment, the whole truth was unfolded to the unfortunate duchess! The shock which she experienced was dreadful: she did not, however, shed a single tear. Bitter reflections, profound indignation, stifled her sensibility, or at least repressed all its movements. She felt herself alone in the world, and covered with shame and remorse. "Ignominious splendour!" exclaimed she, "detestable pomp, I can at last dismiss thee! a fatal bond retained me in this palace: it is now broken. I am here now only a stranger; but where shall I find an asylum?—Could I dare to re-appear in my own country? It is not sufficient to fly, I must hereafter conceal myself—I shall chuse the most obscure retreat. I shall

MAHARAJA SERFOJI'S SARASWATI MAHAL

die in oblivion; no one will now come in quest of me." This last reflection so oppressed her mind, that all her strength abandoned her. She was not willing to call for assistance, however, and was about to faint, when Benserade was announced. The sight of a friend recalled her spirits, and her tears began to flow. Benserade, who was much affected, asked her the cause of her grief. The duchess replied, at first, only by tears; afterwards, she handed him the tablets, informing him, that Madame de Montespan had left them. "Well," said Benserade, "it is evident she wished to inform you of a secret of which no one was ignorant but yourself. The means she has taken, shews she acts without the knowledge of the king, and even contrary to his will. So long as the king wishes to conceal this intrigue from you, he wishes to preserve

preserve you: avenge yourself, therefore, of Madame de Montespan, by remaining. Pretend to know nothing of this affair; appear as if you had never seen the tablets."

"What do you propose to me?" said the duchess: "to dissimulate; to remain here when he deceives and betrays me, and when he loves me no longer!" "If you would," replied Benserade, "you may still reign; you may always reign alone, in spite of your rival."—"Ah! Of what consequence is that to me?" replied Madame de la Valliere: "when he loved only me, did I wish to reign?" "No," replied Benserade, "and by so acting, you even weakened the interest you had in his heart; princes only become firmly attached to those who obtain from them extraordinary favours, and enjoy them with magnificence. The gifts they

bestow, are, in their own eyes, as well as in those of others, the standard of the sentiment they experience: they conceive they love, when they are astonished at the magnitude of the benefits they have conferred, and which they have no longer the power to recal; they incline not to form a new connexion, which would give to another the right to exert the same ambition; and it is their interest it should be believed that they have nothing similar to confer. Your moderation has secured the esteem of the Parisians; but it has deprived you of all consideration at court. Resume this empire; it is yet time; you will no longer hold it from the intoxication of passion; it will be more solid; gratitude and friendship will bestow it upon you, and nothing will henceforth be able to wrest from you the gift!"—"Ah!" exclaimed the

duchess

duchess, "what should I do with this odious empire, which you offer me as a compensation for lost affection?—I have refused it from his love—shall I receive it from his pity?—When I was beloved, I always considered as a kind of insult the solicitations of strangers: I rejected, with coldness, the advances of ministers, and those in power: it is thus I have procured so many enemies. After having sacrificed my reputation, I wished, at least, to evince, by the honour and disinterestedness of my affection, how much he deserved to be loved!—I console myself by ambition; usurp a credit dishonourable in my own eyes!"—"You carry your delicacy too far; reflection will suggest other sentiments."—"Never." "Think how exquisite it will be to depress and humble your rival, and all your enemies; if you act a violent

part, you will only accomplish their wishes." "What avails their joy to me? I can think only on my misfortunes. Whether they triumph or not, I shall not be less unfortunate. He no longer loves me! What other sentiment can find a place in my heart? Alas! even jealousy itself cannot withdraw me from it. He no longer loves me! I am no longer necessary to his happiness! What do I say? I am even an obstacle to it. He will suffer no more from me; he will no longer seek me; he will forget me! Terrible and incomprehensible ideas! They chill and confound the imagination." On pronouncing these words, there was depicted on her countenance such a wildness, that Benserade became terrified; he said every thing to console her, which friendship could suggest. The duchess made no reply: she had taken her

her resolution; a resolution which, as she was certain would be combated, she did not communicate. Scarcely had Benserade retired, when the duchess wrote the following letter to the king.

"You no longer love me! I have seen the dreadful decree traced with your own hand—I have read it! . . . . At least, it will never be confirmed by your lips. That cherished voice, which has hitherto served only to inspire me with courage, and confirm my attachment, I shall not hear it perjure itself; I shall not behold the unkind expression of embarrassment and indifference on your countenance. I go! Ah! why, since deprived of all illusion, should I wish to see you? I should no longer know you! O! Heavens! what will become of me! I find in the universe only a horrible solitude, and despair has taken pos-

 session

session of my whole soul. Alas! whilst you loved me, my feelings of remorse evinced I was not wholly estranged from virtue; your love even fortified such sentiments. Could I console myself in being no longer worthy of your tenderness, and in not justifying your attachment by an irreproachable character? But, having lost your heart, what is left for me to regret? You have bereaved me of every thing; yes, of all! even of the very feeling which could palliate my crimes. I have no reproach to make; no, you seduced me not; I destroyed myself! I loved you when yet at a distance; and whilst concealed in the crowd I saw only you, I then existed only for you. While your wandering looks were never directed to me, my eyes sought only you! . . . . I gave myself up to you without hope, and I ought to

love

love you without astonishment. I only am foolish and criminal, but I am also alone to be pitied. Is it possible you can entirely forget me? . . . When far from you, in an obscure retreat, you will think no more of me. You will never hear my name pronounced—you will be ignorant whether I exist, or whether my sufferings have terminated. How distressing is this idea. During the days of my happiness, even death did not appear to me so terrible. What is life to me, when effaced for ever from your recollection? . . . . But pity will, perhaps, sometimes recal me to your mind! . . . Pity! alas! is pity then the only sentiment I can henceforth expect from you? . . . . . Unfortunate wretch that I am. Yesterday—this morning, I thought myself beloved: —the night passed, my repose was sweet, and my first thought, on opening

ing my eyes, was a sentiment of happiness! But in an hour after all the vain phantoms of deceitful felicity vanished for ever from my eyes.—There remain for me only a stained reputation, an unhappy love, without any illusion, and a shame, which repentance cannot overcome! O! if I blushed for my weakness when I was loved by you, how shall I now be able to support the weight of dishonour? I have now no refuge but in obscurity—no hope but in oblivion! While I possessed your heart, I was criminal in my own eyes, but I could not be degraded in those of others! . . Your glory will no longer be reflected on me! It will ever be dear to me, but I shall no longer have the right to be proud of it. You have separated your destiny from mine, and I must hereafter be only a wretched being, useless on the earth, and even devoted

devoted to sorrow. In the surprise of so sudden a revolution in the disorder and tumult of my thoughts, I know that I cannot yet feel all the horrors of my situation, and I tremble to think that each reflection must aggravate my sufferings! Time, therefore, instead of mitigating my pain, will only serve to increase it! . . I am a mother,—but, alas! my children belong not to me. When forced to fly from you, I must abandon them. I shall only sometimes leave my solitude, to behold them for a few moments. O how do I blush to think I am a mother! What excuse can I make to them. They will know that you have ceased to love me. Since I knew my misfortune, I have not seen my daughter! What will become of me—what shall I say to her, when she shall speak to me of you? She will never pronounce your name,

without rending my heart, and yet I shall wish to hear that name from her lips. Her affection for you is a tie still dear to me! Ah! you will still love my children! There will exist, then, one sentiment common to us, which we both shall feel, and which no other will share with us. Adieu! I leave to my children all your gifts. I shall take with me only one—the first I received from you——those bracelets I never shall part with!—Alas! no one will now envy my wearing them. Adieu! I never loved you so much! Yes—I must, for once, tell you, what I shall always feel!—But you will never reply to me! O! frightful and terrible silence! That of the grave is less dreadful, for it is accompanied by repose! . . . . Adieu! if any recollection of me should sometimes recur to your imagination, trouble yourself not. I have merited my fate,

fate, by my imprudence and my weakness. I am resigned. I sigh, but I murmur not——but, in whatever moment you think of me, you may say to yourself—— "she now weeps as she did on the day of her departure!"

The unhappy duchess directed a valet-de-chambre to deliver this letter to the king as he should come out from the council. Afterwards she embraced her children, tore herself, in a deluge of tears, from their arms, and went to shut herself up in the convent of Chaillot. This was the second time she had taken refuge there: But how different—how changed was her situation! On the first occasion, she still was pure, and fled from an impassioned lover. Dignity, honour, virtue——all the noblest emotions of the heart supported her courage; but now, lost in her own esteem, and covered

vered with shame and grief, she looked forward only to disgrace and sorrow.

The nuns of Chaillot, though they lamented her errors, still preserved for her the tenderest attachment.—Madame de la Valliere, far from forgetting them, during her residence at court, took a pleasure in heaping benefits upon them.—She sent, every year, alms for their poor, and rich presents for the church. On her arrival, her first care was to shut herself up, alone, in her apartment.—There she passed the remainder of the day, but her reflections were few and unsteady. She listened.—The smallest noise in the courts, or towards the gates, the slightest movement in the house, produced in her the most violent palpitations of heart, after which she sunk into stupor. The day passed away in this manner. At last, night came,

came, and entirely deprived her of that secret hope which she had hitherto confusedly preserved. It was now that the measure of her misfortunes was completed. The agitation occasioned by a precipitate departure, and a vague idea of the effect it would produce on the heart of the king, had hitherto supported her; but she had remained eight hours at Chaillot; had he left her there; had he not deigned to reply; had he then joined cruelty to the most barbarous inconstancy? What reflections!

Anger and indignation are, of all sentiments, the most painful and distressing to those who possess mildness and generosity of character! The recent impressions which Madame de la Valliere experienced, were as much more afflictive, as they were in opposition to her natural sensibility. Till then her friendship and her great affection

fection for the king had exceeded her love; but her resentment and anger, by heightening her grief, seemed to augment her passion. Her sentiments, much less tender, became more violent; her wounded pride was mingled with personal animosity and all the torments of jealousy. Her mind was so intensely occupied with the ideas of her rival, as to reduce her almost to a state of despair.— She represented to herself Madame de Montespan, appearing with all the fascinating graces of youth and beauty, triumphant, adored, and exercising over the king a sovereign sway. She saw her enemies full of joy, surrounding the king, receiving from him testimonies of his favour, and forming a brilliant court around her rival. She recalled to mind the counsels of Benserade; and, although she had rejected them with

as

as much sincerity as disdain, she now repented that she had not followed them. Her heart alone had spoken in the morning, and the contemplation of the cruel desertion she had suffered, provoked her egotism and self-love. "Yes," she cried, "I should have remained; I might, at least, have forced them to restrain themselves. Never, in my presence, had he dared to declare himself so openly in her favour. By feigning complete ignorance, I prevented that perfidious woman from continuing to play an odious part, which must eventually have rendered her contemptible in the estimation of the king. Not having been able to procure my exile, she wished to precipitate my flight, and I have fallen into the snare!....Ah! what have I done? It is she, doubtless, who keeps back the king: she dreads lest he may again

again see me; that he may again listen to me!....Does she think, then, that I might still move his heart to pity, and perhaps reclaim him? What! I am not banished: might not I return to Versailles, and, by again appearing there, confound my enemies? Yes, I will see him again—speak to him. I will appear before him, to reproach my rival with her hidden treachery. The king shall know with what artifice she gained my confidence. I will tell how I loved her! Yes: whilst she plotted my destruction, I loved her!---She robbed me of his heart, she seduced him, and I loved her!—I will learn to overcome my natural timidity. I will be avenged."

The duchess did not long persist in these resolutions, so contrary to her true character. Depression soon succeeded to anger; rage abandoned her,

her, and she remained a prey to despair. She, again, accused only herself of her own misfortunes.

When all had retired to rest, the profound silence which reigned throughout the mansion produced, in her mind, a sort of oppression.—She found herself still more alone. She was not terrified, but she dreaded herself. Alas! who does not fear to fathom a heart torn by love and jealousy! It cannot be probed, without producing still more irritation, and discovering new wounds!—The duchess opened a window, which looked into the principal court: the heat was excessive, and the night calm and beautiful. Madame de la Valliere fixed her eyes, filled with tears, on the iron gate, which is only opened for the admission of bishops or princes. She recalled to mind, that, overcome by the entreaties of the

king,

king, she had departed with him through this gate of the cloister.—"Great God!" said she, "why had I not then the courage to resist him! I might, at least, have preserved his esteem, and my own. I should now have been tranquil and respected! More than eight years have elapsed since that fatal period; and, notwithstanding his cares and his tenderness, I have never, during this space of time, enjoyed a single day of uninterrupted repose!—I was never inured to vice: I never ceased to deplore the loss of my innocence. It appears that I persisted in a criminal passion, only to experience all its bitterness!—But how he loved me!—With what violence, and what passion, he compelled me to follow him!—Here every thing recals to my mind the passion he had for me; but, in the palace he inhabits, every surrounding

rounding object invites him to forget it! Whilst I, only a profane stranger in this abode of sanctity, alone, forsaken, a fugitive, pass my nights without repose, and my days without object, or hope, he is in the midst of a brilliant court, surrounded by glory, honours, and pleasures: can he, in such a situation, regret the unfortunate being whom he has sacrificed? This is the hour which he dedicates, every evening, to society: doubtless, at this moment, he is engaged in some amusing conversation: he listens with interest, he replies with his accustomed grace, and the smile plays upon his lips!—And me, I yield to my overpowering griefs! My groans are lost among these solitary vaults: the echo of the cloister repeats, for the first time, the foolish complaints of love: the object which produces them

them is far distant, and no friend collects them !"—

At these words she rose up, and, with tottering steps, took a few turns in her chamber: afterwards she resolved to pass a part of the night in the cemetery; not in order to enjoy the freshness of the fountain, and the verdure, but the better to retrace one striking recollection, and to complete the intoxication of melancholy and grief. In this renowned age the women were fearful and timid: the most wise and enlightened among them merely directed their attention to the regulation of time, and the conduct of life. Having never endeavoured to penetrate into the secrets of nature, their lively and flexible imaginations vaguely multiplied mysteries and prodigies. Being perfectly informed respecting their duties, and the common affairs

affairs of life, and having the most just and accurate ideas on moral subjects, they furnished an example, that want of physical knowledge is not essential to solidity of character, the graces of the mind, and the improvement of manners.

Madame de la Valliere, educated in a remote province, possessed more, perhaps, than any other female, the superstitious weaknesses, which proceed less from credulity and fixed belief, than from early impressions.--- It should seem, that profound grief, without eradicating these gloomy ideas, may yet rid the mind from the terrors which they inspire. The duchess, whilst every person was buried in sleep, descended alone, at midnight, into the cloister. An almost expiring lamp threw only a feeble and unsteady light, into a long vaulted cemetery, which she slowly traversed.

On entering the cloister, she was only guided by the light of the moon, which shone through the vaulted arches. The melancholy murmur of the water, as it glided around the tombs, appeared to her to produce sounds extremely plaintive. She was affected, and paused. In proportion as she went on, she felt her fears increase. She, however, advanced, and suddenly stood petrified with terror at the sight of an unusual object. It appeared like a figure in profile, in the very bloom of youth, of celestial beauty, kneeling upon a hillock of turf, and embracing a crucifix. The terrified duchess conceived she beheld her own apparition; such as she was, in the same place, and in the same attitude, when the king carried her off.----She recalled to mind all the fabulous traditions, which relate that persons, who see a phantom resembling

bling themselves, are menaced with inevitable death.---She turned pale, and, fixing her eyes upon the object, which appeared immoveable: "Great God!" she exclaimed, "by retracing my image, under the character of innocence and piety, which I then possessed, and which I have since lost, do you wish, at the same time, to reanimate my remorse, and announce to me my approaching end? But why am I filled with horror? O! God! ought I to fear death? And can I regret life, if you accept my repentance?"----Whilst pronouncing these words she advanced, trembling, on which the kneeling figure turned about, and viewed her with terror. Madame de la Valliere became reassured, on discovering her to be a young female, with a white veil, in the garb of a novice. "Who are you?" said she to her. "I am Em-

meline," replied the novice; "to-morrow I am to pronounce my vows, and I came here to pass the night in prayer."---"What is your age?"---"Sixteen."---"Could you not, then, sleep?"---"No: joy prevented me. To-morrow is for me a day of happiness."---"Have you lived in the world?"---"I have remained in this convent from my infancy. I was never beyond its walls."---"Ah! you are perfectly happy!---O! my child! you know not all your good fortune! —You know not what perils, what grievous struggles, what distracting and useful regrets you have escaped! This insurmountable barrier, placed between you and the world, is a rampart, which will defend you against the most formidable attacks, and the most heart-rending misfortunes.—This gate, which will be shut upon you, never again to open, will separate you

you from seducers, from the wicked, and the envious. Ah! never regard this sacred sanctuary as a prison! It is here, only, you can enjoy that liberty, which is alone desirable: here, only, you can follow continually, and without distraction, the best principles of the heart, and the inspirations of conscience.---Beyond these walls, example, custom, and the passions, exercise a cruel tyranny!---This is the residence of virtue and truth. Every thing is in harmony with the sentiments of a pure and innocent heart!"---Whilst she thus spoke, her countenance was bathed in tears. "You weep," said the young Emmeline; "have you any cause of sorrow?---We will pray together. God will console you."---"Emmeline, pray for me!"—"With all my heart." On pronouncing these words, the novice embraced the iron

 cross,

cross, joining her hands with the most affecting fervor!—"Interesting Emmeline," cried the duchess, "quit not this revered token of your salvation: never suffer yourself to be torn from it!"—Her sighs prevented her from continuing. She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and departed. She returned to her chamber, and, throwing herself on her bed, retraced more perfectly than ever, the striking dream she had, in this place, nine years before; and in which, in the midst of an unknown church, she had seen, on an elevated gallery, this majestic figure, inviting her to take refuge under a mysterious veil, which it presented to her. These religious ideas, these vague, but virtuous projects, calmed, in some measure, her lively sorrow; and, during her sleep, she still beheld the innocent and pious Emmeline, watching and pray-

ing,

ing, on her behalf, at the foot of the cross. She arose, two hours after day-break, somewhat less agitated; but, on going to the window that opened into the court, she found a secret hope again springing up in her mind, which re-produced all the misery and agitation she had experienced during the night.

She had remained more than an hour seated at her window, when she heard, at a distance, the noise of a horse, at full gallop, and soon afterwards distinguished a carriage, drawn by six or eight horses, which almost immediately stopped before the great gate of the convent. Scarcely able to breath, she continued to listen, with the utmost anxiety. When they rung, the nuns flocked together.—They spoke to them through the grate; but Madame de la Valliere could not hear what was said. She

 trembled,

trembled, however, on seeing them hastily lower their veils. "It is he! It is he himself!" she exclaimed, with transport, and deceitful joy once again, seduced her heart!—All is pardoned, all forgotten: misery, anger, jealousy, all; even her pride.---What shall I say? Ah! far from preserving any resentment, she was prepared to receive him with the most lively gratitude. "It is he!----he always loved!"—The recollection of the past left on her mind no other feeling but remorse, for ever being able to doubt it. The gate was opened, but what was the disappointment of Madame de la Valliere, when, instead of the king, whom she expected with the most entire confidence, she saw the great Condé enter! He was alone! The unfortunate duchess hastily retired from the window, and fell into a chair!—A few minutes after

after, the prince entered her chamber, and advanced towards her with an air of eagerness and sensibility. He delivered a letter from the king, at the same time informing her, he was charged to re-conduct her to court: that Lewis expected her with impatience, and was extremely afflicted at her flight.——"Once before," said Madame de la Valliere, "he came to seek me himself." At these words she opened, with a trembling hand, the king's letter, in which was expressed a tenderness, which he could not refuse to so many interesting qualities. He conjured the duchess to return, and protested he could not enjoy happiness without her. This letter breathed a tone of the most sincere friendship, but it was no longer that of love. Madame de la Valliere placed it on a table; and, casting down her eyes, preserved

 a mournful

a mournful silence. The prince began by observing he had always entertained a great respect for her character, and he proceeded to give her counsels, nearly similar to those she had before received from Benserade. He spoke to her of ambition. She heard him not; but, after a few moment's reflection, "Let us go," said she; "he recals me: I formerly quitted this asylum to follow him: I will not now refuse to friendship what I had, once before, the weakness to grant to love." She sighed, on pronouncing these words; and, rising up, departed, leaning on the arm of the great Condé. At the gate of the convent, she embraced the nuns, weeping. "This is not a final adieu," said she to them: "I will assuredly return, and, perhaps, very soon." She ascended the carriage with

with the prince, and they took, at full speed, the road to Versailles.

During the short absence of Madame de la Valliere, a great many intrigues were going forward at court. The king had not perused the letter of the duchess without emotion and self-reproach. On this subject a very animated explanation took place with Madame de Montespan, who affirmed, that it had happened, altogether, by chance. Lewis appeared to give credit to her assertion; but, as some doubts still remained on his mind, he firmly determined, notwithstanding her efforts and insinuations, to recal the duchess. Madame de Montespan had foreseen her retirement, and flattered herself the king, at the bottom of his heart, must be pleased with a step, which would free him from the presence of a woman he no longer loved, for she had no con-

ception that a tender attachment could survive the extinction of love. The wicked, in spite of all their cunning, frequently make erroneous calculations. Great errors are often connected with elevated sentiments; but, in order to understand this, on several occasions, we must ourselves possess greatness of soul. This was especially necessary in judging of the character of Lewis the XIV.

Madame de Montespan had, besides, another unforeseen subject of chagrin. The duchess had many enemies, but very few partisans. Her disgrace, however, appeared to inspire a sentiment very generally in her favour. She could no more be an object of envy, since it was supposed she would never again leave her retreat. In courts a perpetual exile produces nearly the same effect as death: it extinguishes hatred: each,

each, in secret, makes a melancholy application to themselves. It is on such occasions that the fragility of favour produces, in the firmest minds, a kind of dismay!---The disgrace of Madame de la Valliere rendered her rival odious. Every one recalled instances of the goodness, mildness, and disinterestedness of her character. They dreaded Madame de Montespan, rightly judging that no dependance could be placed on one, who had sacrificed her friend with so much audacity and inhumanity. Personal interest, conjoined with pity, produced, in their minds, a sense of justice; and even the friends of Madame de Montespan evinced, on the present occasion, so much astonishment as amounted to a reprobation of her conduct. They had wished she might be able to supplant her rival; but they were appalled at the

violence and rapidity with which she had effected her purpose; as it was, at first, generally supposed the duchess had been ordered to quit the court. The moral code of courtiers permit them to seek the destruction of those whom they fear; but, in doing this, certain forms and attentions are prescribed, the omission of which incurs universal blame. At court, more than any where else, we discover the fewest scruples respecting the basis of certain actions, and the greatest delicacy in regard to appearances. The manners of courtiers, in all the different relations of life, would appear under a more inviting form than among any other class of society, if the motives which influence their conduct could always remain a secret. Those who are not in their confidence rarely find occasion to blame either their conversa-

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tion or behaviour. It is the intrigues we discover which merit reprobation. New favourites, who cannot pretend to any consideration but that which is produced by respectability of character, have, in general, for enemies, those who expect nothing from their influence. Thus all those, who had never been particularly connected with any of the two favourites, declared themselves hostile to Madame de Montespan: some from a feeling of just indignation, and others to display uprightness and sensibility. In the world, to blame with severity the errors of another, is one of the methods to advance our own reputation, which costs the least, and is often attended with the greatest success.

Madame de Montespan, terrified and surprised at this outrageous treatment, declared, although with regret, that the departure of the duchess had been

been voluntary; that the king regreted it, and had recalled her. It was extremely vexatious for a person, so vain and ambitious as Madame de Montespan, to be forced herself to weaken the opinion which was entertained of her credit; but her self-love could not support the universal clamour. She affirmed to her friends, and even to the king, that she always loved Madame de la Valliere; that she saw her at court with pleasure, and was desirous the king should show her all the regards and attentions of friendship. She declaimed so ingeniously on friendship, and the *invincible power of love*, that she persuaded the king, by her seducing speeches, not only to excuse her perfidy, but to believe she possessed sentiments of feeling and generosity.

Madame de la Valliere had scarcely arrived at Versailles, before Lewis flew

flew to her house. The emotion he experienced, on again seeing her, prevented the embarrassment she would otherwise have felt. No explanation took place: the king clasped the duchess in his arms, shedding tears of sincerity. He depicted, with the truest sensibility, the chagrin he had experienced; and, before his departure, he sent for her daughter, and, falling on his knees with this charming infant, he said, "*Abandon us no more.*" Nothing more was necessary to satisfy a heart so tender. Not being able to doubt the inconstancy of the king, Madame de la Valliere became persuaded that he had deceived himself, respecting his own sentiments; that he was hurried away; seduced; and that he would return wholly to herself. This illusion dissipated, as by enchantment, her grief, and was

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an indemnification for every thing she had suffered.

As none had approved her apparent disgrace, each was inclined to assume credit for a sentiment, authorised by the example of the king. Those who even grieved at her return, believed they ought to support the opinion they had imprudently displayed. Her enemies hoped and desired a reconciliation; because they conceived Madame de Montespan would lose all her influence, unless it were true she had not contributed to the departure of the duchess. They were, besides, conscious that, at least, she had made vain efforts to prevent her return. They supposed that the duchess, instructed by experience, would publicly break with her rival, and, at last, assume a degree of power, which would, in future, preserve her from every

every reverse of fortune. These ideas re-animated all her friends: they determined to give her prudent counsel, and they flattered themselves she would follow it with facility. Those persons who had formerly regarded her with indifference, but who had declared in her favour, at the time of her flight, now conceived they had acquired a right to her gratitude.—They proudly repeated what before had only been whispered by them, in particular circles. There was no appearance of meanness in now displaying an enthusiasm for her, since they had regretted her disgrace. All the court, therefore, hastened to wait upon her. Even Madame sent to enquire after her health. Her friends returned to her feet, and her triumph was complete. At last Madame de Montespan, with rage in her heart, but carried along, as it were, by the current,

current, presented herself at the door of Madame de la Valliere; but she advanced no farther, for orders had been given not to admit her. To complete her vexation, she perceived that the attentions and honours paid to the duchess produced a very agreeable impression in the mind of the king.

She knew he had frequently observed, that it charmed him to observe justice done to Madame de la Valliere, and that he was extremely pleased to see, by the attention which was now paid to her, that she had always been regarded with the esteem she merited. Acted upon by so many causes of fear and envy, and governed by anger and resentment, Madame de Montespan committed many imprudences. She possessed much suppleness of character, while supported and encouraged by success, or, at least, by

a strong

a strong hope; but when she met with disappointment, she could not repress the movements of her imperious temper, and then displayed an ungovernable haughtiness. Madame de Montespan made sascastic remarks on all those who declared themselves openly for her rival. She wearied her friends with her complaints; lost several, disgusted others, and procured for herself irreconcilable enemies. She passed four or five days in a state of the most cruel anxiety. After various reflections, she adopted what was, for her, a singular resolution. She determined to speak to the king, with some degree of frankness, respecting her situation. She remarked to him, that Madame de la Valliere, by refusing to see her, did her an irreparable injury in the public opinion: that a rivalry, founded on the most imperious passions, might be

be excused; but that the marked resentment of the duchess would make it be believed that she had been guilty of unheard-of perfidy towards her; that many thought she had caused the exile of the duchess, but that the king had afterwards repented of so rigorous a measure; that it was only to this false idea, which was injurious even to his majesty, that the attentions paid to the duchess were to be attributed; and, finally, that the king ought to desire Madame de la Valliere to receive the visits of a woman, who had never ceased to love her, and whose only fault was the not having been able to resist the force of sentiment to which she herself had yielded. The king was affected by this explanation. He loved whatever had the appearance of sincerity. The proposition of compelling the duchess to receive her

rival,

rival, appeared to him, however, very strange. He opposed it. But Madame de Montespan reminded him, that he had already required nearly the same conduct to be followed by Madame, with respect to Madame de la Valliere. Finally, she pressed, with the greatest earnestness, supplicated in tears, and threatened to leave the court. The king, who was amorous, after much hesitation and resistance, promised to do as she desired. Not liking, however, to make such a proposition to the duchess, personally, he conveyed it to her, in writing, couched in the tenderest expressions; but, at the same time, accompanied with a very perceptible tone of authority.

When Madame de la Valliere received this billet, she was alone with Benserade: her surprise equalled her chagrin. Having mentioned the subject

ject to Benserade, he advised her to return a refusal. "But he will have it so," replied she, sobbing. "No," said Benserade, "the king is just:—he will approve your refusal; he will respect your resistance: it is full time for you to display some firmness of character."——"Ah! Benserade, when a woman has been weak enough to betray her principles, would she not be wrong to assume the appearance of firmness, on an occasion in which she may want it without a crime?" "You can no more admit into your company a dangerous and perfidious woman, who has already so basely betrayed you. She has been disgraced by her behaviour towards you; but, if you see her again, she will be justified as to the most essential points in the opinion of the world; you will lose the ascendancy which you have acquired over the king, and you

you will be justly accused of an inexcusable weakness: you will check the enthusiasm and zeal of your new partizans; and your old enemies, who are at present softened and disarmed, will use more dangerous weapons against you than those of hatred.—They will no longer do you the honour of attacking you with violence: they will treat you with contempt and derision. They will not persecute you with zeal—they will destroy you by ridicule. All those who are attached to you only from motives of ambition, will again withdraw from you, and this time it will be for ever. The Duke of Longueville and I will then be your only friends, and we shall only have a sterile friendship to offer you, which will not be capable of preserving you from the painful regrets you will then assuredly experience."—" I feel all the force of your reasons,"

reasons," said the duchess, sighing; "but, my dear Benserade, you wish me to play an important part, of which I am incapable. I might, as well as another, have been able to turn to advantage a favour legitimately acquired; but, in my situation, all ideas of ambition excite my horror: my wretched name will, doubtless, be placed in the ignominious list of the mistresses of kings; but my only consolation is the hope that the impartial historian will, at least, distinguish me, by a particular character, from those ambitious women; will not confound me with my rival, and will attribute my conduct only to love. Thus, though I were to refuse to see Madame de Montespan, I should not, on that account, acquire the more credit—I should not the less lose the good-will of the intriguing and ambitious; for I am irrevocably

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determined never to interfere with public affairs, and to live always in solitude."—" At least," said Bensérade, " do not degrade your character by so mean a compliance."—" What can a woman refuse to him, for whom she has sacrificed her honour?"--"Why expose yourself to humiliations of so extraordinary a nature?"—" Alas! I merit them all. Besides, my friend, if the king does not feel properly for my submission, if he abuses his power, my retirement is prepared. I shall withdraw myself for ever. But I am certain that he merely wishes I should, for once, receive Madame de Montespan, in order to silence those who pretend that, not content with having robbed me of the king's heart, she wished to exile me, and opposed my recal. I believed this last accusation to be well founded——I am now certain of the contrary."——

 " How?

"How?" "The king has given me his word that she never spoke of me but with tenderness." "Tenderness!"— "I am sensible it was hypocrisy—but that at least proves she was not guilty of all the wickedness attributed to her." "I admire your credulity."— "No; I now know Madame de Montespan——she has done me too much injury for me to think of her with indulgence; I cannot avoid, however, to justify her from the imaginary crimes which are imputed to her; and then, as I have told you, he wishes it!" "Ah!" cried Bensérade, "notwithstanding your understanding, with the character you possess, you cannot fail to fall into the snares of the wicked: you are born to become their victim."

Notwithstanding this conversation, and the extreme repugnance Madame de la Valliere felt to receive the visits of

of Madame de Montespan, she sent the following answer to the king:

"I cannot, even to regain your heart, act or speak falsely. It is impossible for me to dissemble that I never shall believe in the sincerity of a person who has betrayed my confidence and friendship with so much artifice and cruelty:—But I can sacrifice myself to afford you satisfaction. I consent to obey you, and shall receive Madame de Montespan."

On the same evening Madame de Montespan visited the duchess. She assumed a sort of sentimental air, embraced her several times, and wept much. Madame de la Valliere was cold and silent: she was not the dupe of this hypocrisy. A certain feeling of modesty, however, prevented her from treating her with contempt.—She regarded her as being so vile, that

she durst not venture to shew that she knew all her baseness. There are things which a delicate mind is ashamed to appear to know. To perceive them, or conjecture them, appears to be a stain. This delicacy, which few can comprehend, frequently gives to persons, who think nobly, the appearance of a blindness, or a credulity, which belongs not to them*.

Madame de Montespan having been received by the duchess without anger, and without disdain, boasted every where that she had entered into a satisfactory explanation with her, and lavished praises on her sensibility. Some laughed at the credulity of Madame de la Valliere, while others

* Almost all these details, relative to the apparent reconciliation of the two rivals, are historical facts.

regarded

regarded her conduct as mean and false. The pardoning of offences is neither much practised nor admired at court. It is a kind of heroic virtue, which is never applauded, except in royal personages. When the pompous name of clemency cannot be given to it, the courtier then regards it as a ridiculous pretension, or a total want of character.

The king being prepossessed by the report of Madame de Montespan, really believed that the duchess had shewn marks of affection to her rival at their meeting. This conduct he regarded as weak and trifling, and this idea destroyed in his mind all the value he had put upon the sacrifice he induced her to make. The duchess was extremely surprised to see Madame de Montespan visit her, as formerly, every evening, at the hour the king was accustomed to call with

some of the particular friends of Madame de la Valliere. It was in vain she received her rival in the most distant manner. Madame de Montespan pretended not to perceive her coldness. She supported the principal part in the conversation, and never appeared more brilliant and amiable. While she charmed the king by her graces, her vivacity, and the originality of her sallies, Madame de la Valliere was downcast, melancholy, and silent. Far from endeavouring to enter into a contest with her rival, she felt only discouragement, when she saw the king applaud her. She felt herself degraded by the confident and insulting conduct of Madame de Montespan: to that sensation was added all the torment of jealousy, and all the embarrassment which arose from having imposed upon her a part which she

was

was unable to support with ease and dignity.

Having deprived Madame de la Valliere of all the advantage of an interesting situation, Madame de Montespan, gave vent, without restraint, to the impetuous emotions of a base, ambitious, and vindictive character. She calculated that, in her situation, it was, perhaps, better to make herself feared than loved. This is always the policy of bad hearts, and for them it has great advantages: it gratifies pride and all the odious passions. Madame de Montespan now thought of nothing but how to distinguish her power, by the disgrace of the friends of Madame de la Valliere. She told the king that she was extremely afflicted at the cold, and even impolite manner with which the duchess treated her, but added, that after the sensibility she had shewn

at their first interview, she could not feel any anger at this inconsistent conduct, which she attributed solely to Benserade and the Duke de Langueville, whose advice the duchess implicitly followed. This artifice produced the impression which Madame de Montespan desired; but, before the king explained himself, he wished to examine whether these suspicions were well founded. His own observation soon convinced him that Benserade and the Duke de Langueville hated Madame de Montespan, and some imprudent remarks which they had both made were repeated to him. The king then withdrew all the favour he had shewn them, and Madame de Montespan took care to shew that she was the only cause of their disgrace. She complained of them to every body, and affected to treat them with the most imperious haughtiness.

haughtiness. She had promised Lauzun, to employ all her credit for him in an affair which was of importance to him; but he had shewn regret for the departure of the duchess, and he was disappointed at the moment he thought himself certain of success. This violent conduct produced a kind of respectful terror among the courtiers, which reduced them to silence. Every one detested the character of Madame de Montespan, but no one ventured either to complain of her or blame her, and many tried, by intrigue, to reconcile themselves to a favourite who had become so formidable. On this occasion, Madame de la Valliere displayed all the courage which friendship ever inspires in a good mind. She spoke to the king with energy in support of her friends. Lewis took care not to mention the real cause of their dis-

grace, but complained of the levity of their discourse, and shewed a firm determination never to restore them to their former favour. "Ah!" said the duchess, "that sentiment is not yours; it is insinuated into your mind: what must be the ascendency of the person who can thus change the equity of your nature."—"You are the only one in the world," said he, "whom I would allow to reply to me in this manner: you must see, therefore, that you possess always the same influence over my heart, and be assured, that the like will never be obtained by another." This reply so greatly affected the duchess, that it appeared to her a satisfactory explanation of the sentiments of the king for Madame de Montespan. She never forgot these few words: she constantly recalled them to her memory, and the more she considered them,

them, the more she persuaded herself that the king still preserved the same passion for her, and that not being capable of esteeming Madame de Montespan, he would, at last, break with her.

Benserade had, for several years, been anxious for the enjoyment of liberty and repose, and when he perceived that he had lost the favour of the king, he became altogether disgusted with the court. He had a real attachment for his sovereign, and he was a prince who was never loved but with zeal. Benserade having, a year before, purchased a country house at Gentilly, resolved to retire there, and never more to return to court. This design he immediately put into execution: he departed, and, on arriving at his house, formed the resolution never more to quit it; and caused the following

lines to be engraved on the door of his cabinet:

> Fame, fortune, honours, pomp, adieu!
> Vain allurements, empty shew,
> And even love, farewel to you!
> Though far more painful to forego.

The duchess conceived that she owed it to the friendship of Benserade, to give him, on this occasion, a striking proof of hers. The day after his departure, she proceeded to his house at Gentilly, and declared that she was come for the purpose of passing six weeks with him. She persisted in this resolution, notwithstanding all the representations of Benserade, who explained to her all that she had to fear in remaining so long from the court. The duchess met, at Benserade's, a very interesting woman, of whom he had sometimes spoken to her vaguely, but always with

with admiration. Madame de *** resided at Gentilly with her family, in a house in the neighbourhood of that of Benserade. Though forty-five, her beauty was yet striking, and she was particularly remarkable for her wit, her pleasing gaiety, and the various charms of her society. The duchess and Madame de *** soon felt a reciprocal friendship. The duchess knew, that though Benserade had passionately loved Madame de ***, yet she had preferred to him a younger and less amiable man, one who, besides, was inferior to Benserade in birth and fortune. One day, after she had asked some questions on this subject, Madame de *** said, that to satisfy her curiosity completely, she would, in a few words, relate her history, and proceeded in the following terms:—

"I was born a few leagues from

Orleans: my relations had a considerable fortune, which was almost entirely dissipated at the death of my father. Large debts and hard creditors produced such disorder in our affairs, that we should have been completely ruined, had it not been for the zeal and intelligence of one of our neighbours: that neighbour was M. de ***. Money was wanting to enable my mother to prosecute several law suits, and M. de *** supplied it. He, besides, took every trouble on himself, and, at last, by saving the wrecks of my father's fortune, he succeeded in securing to us a small, but decent fortune. I was then twenty. It became necessary for my mother to go to Paris, to sue for a small inheritance, and she carried me with her. M. de ***, in the hope of being useful, accompanied us thither. Soon after my mother

fell dangerously sick, and was reduced to the last extremity. She then, in the presence of M. de ***, mentioned to me, for the first time, the sentiments he entertained for me, and of which I had hitherto been ignorant. She expressed her wish, that I should return the affection of so kind a friend, to whom we owed so many obligations. M. de *** was then only thirty-four, and his birth, fortune, and character, rendered him, in every respect, a very advantageous match for me; but, if I had not entertained for him the most perfect esteem, it would have been impossible for me to have resisted the request of my dying mother, and I was about to make the promise she required, when M. de *** himself interrupted me. "Do not pledge yourself," said he: "filial piety leaves you, at this moment, no freedom of choice.—

Your mother, Madame, prescribes none. If you should have the misfortune to lose her, you may, therefore, without any scruple, place your affections otherwise. Beside this bed, where I share your sorrows, I vow to you the friendship of a brother, and will confine myself to the duties of that character, if your heart should not hereafter permit me to aspire to another."

M. de *** persevered in this delicate generosity. My mother died, and M. de ***, without even speaking to me of his love, became my only protector. He spent six weeks in weeping with me. He afterwards set out to our province, for the purpose of settling some business, both on his own account and mine. He left me at Paris with his sister, the Countess of L***, a rich young widow, who saw a great deal of company.

pany. We were then involved in all the troubles of the Fronde*, but every one lived in Paris, in perfect security. The French, who are the most war-like people in the universe, are also the most mild and amiable. Even their hatred is not violent, except when it is produced by love. It is never implacable, except against the enemies of those to whom they are bound by affection. Their attachment to their princes, and their enthusiasm for the great Condé, roused all their resentment against Cardinal Mazarin. M. de ***, and the countess, his sister, belonged to the party of the princes, and my opinion was fixed by knowing theirs. The spirit of party, when founded on an entire confidence in those we love, is, in general, more ardent than when we take a side, in consequence of the re-

* Opposition to the court in administration.

sult of our own reflections. The latter may be changed by farther reflection; but a blind opinion is not capable of modification, because it is embraced independently of all reasoning.

At the countess's I had an opportunity of seeing the finest women of the court, and the most celebrated men, who adhered to the opposition party:—the Duchess of Langueville, Madame de Chatellon, Madame de Montbazen, the great Condé, the Duke of Nemours, the Duke of Beaufort, Fosseuse, Sevigné, Matta, the Duke of Rochefaucault. The conversation was always animated.—*The subjects were always political, whatever might be the age, or the sex, of the parties; and the greater their ignorance, the more boldly they decided**. *There never before were*

* Memoires de Nemours.

heard

heard so much conversation about generosity without honour, so many fine speeches with so little good sense: there never before were seen so many actions without plans, so many plans without actions, and so many enterprises without results.*

"These extraordinary movements had a powerful influence while they existed. One may, without reflection, and in particular when experience is wanting, enlist, with noble and pure motives, under the banners of a party; but, when the civil storm is passed, upright hearts and sound minds will always regret, with astonishment and remorse, that they had not formerly the same disgust for disturbances, which are the cause of so many evils. One good, however, results from those events; which is,

* Memoires de la Rochefoucault.

that

that they teach us the first value of peace and tranquillity.

"A short time after the departure of M. de ***, the countess informed me, that she impatiently expected one of the relations of her late husband, whom she greatly respected, although he belonged to the Mazarin party; and she solicited me to aid, with my best endeavours, her attempts to bring him over to that of the prince. I was very much flattered to be thus associated to the affairs of state, and impatiently expected this royalist, who was represented to me, besides, as one of the most amiable and brilliant men of the court. Attempts were made to combat his arguments, and to bring him over, and such schemes are never entered upon with indifference. I hoped to display to him my sovereign contempt for the cardinal,

dinal, and my admiration for the prince (the great Condé.) I was fully aware, that, in order to attach him to our party, slander and admiration would be insufficient. I had a confused glimpse of what importance it would be to please; and, in conformity with this view, prepared myself to act for the good of the cause. Upon his arrival, I found it to be the young Benserade, (not yet thirty years of age,) full of grace, spirit, and sensibility, although already a courtier, and a man of fashion.

It was evident, from this first visit, that I had attracted his attention, which produced, in my mind, a secret joy, that I attributed to my zeal for the princes, and I became, considering my age, the most violent of the party. Benserade sedulously waited on the countess, but his attentions

tentions were wholly dedicated to me. It was easy for the countess to penetrate his sentiments, and she neglected no opportunity to heighten them. I entered completely into her political views, and when I resigned myself to the pleasure of hearkening to Benserade, when I expressed ingenuously what I felt, and when I unreservedly displayed a decided preference for him, I conceived myself acting merely with a view to promote the good cause, and that I possessed all the subtilty and knowledge of the most profound statesman. The countess was one of those who composed the society of Mademoiselle, at whose house all the partizans of the opposition belonging to the court assembled. On my introduction to it, the princess, prepossessed in my favour, bestowed such high encomiums on my zeal, as completed my infatuation.

fatuation. I imagined, that the best expedients to justify these opinions would be to seduce Benserade; and I persuaded myself, that the most important victory for our party, would be to obtain a conquest over him. In reality, how can it be questioned? Benserade possessed so enchanting a gaiety, conversed with so much grace, and composed such pretty verses!...... It was to me that he addressed that celebrated sonnet, which, by being contrasted with a similar production from the pen of Voiture, produced so much rivalry between them; and divided, as is well known, for a long time, the court and the city. But it was, at last, universally allowed, that the production of Benserade displayed much more delicacy and sensibility. I was proud of this decision, and my heart confirmed it. Benserade, however,

ever, had not yet spoken of his love; we never, indeed, had been alone. He waited for a favourable opportunity, which chance soon offered.

The prince had caused his soldiers to fasten upon their arms tresses and knots of straw: all the partizans of the opposition immediately decked themselves with this kind of badge, and, as the people insulted those who did not wear it, the royalists durst not walk in the streets or public places, and they only went out in carriages, or when the night was very dark. One day, the countess mentioned that Mademoiselle was to meet her in the promenade, to which she should immediately go after dinner. It was agreed, that I should be of the party, and that we should proceed on foot. On rising from table, I went into my apartment to dress; and afterwards went into a

closet

closet to make a wisp of straw to place on my head. While I was sitting before a table, on which stood a basket filled with tresses and bits of straw, my door opened, and Benserade entered. My festival was held on this day, and Benserade brought me a bouquet of roses: he kneeled, and presented me with four verses, which I glanced over, and found to contain a declaration of the most violent love. My emotion was extreme:—and I conceived, that the interest of the state required me not to allow such an opportunity to escape, as might prove decisive... After what I had just read, I told him, it appeared to me, that I might receive and wear this bouquet without entering into any kind of engagement."—"Ah, !" cried Benserade, "do not then reject it!... What must I do to obtain such happiness?—speak."...

As he said these words, we heard a noise: He arose; and, at the same instant, the countess entered. She was accompanied by Bouteville and de Coligny, these two generous friends of the prince, who formerly risked their lives in battle, and sacrificed their liberty to save this hero. The countess sought me to accompany her to the promenade. Benserade, believing that, in the presence of witnesses, I would not refuse his bouquet, still continued to press my acceptance of it. Hurried on by the hope of obtaining a brilliant triumph, or, to express more properly, overruled by my passion, "I consent to it," I replied, "but on the condition that you will accept this in exchange," presenting him with a knot of straw; "and that you will go with us to the promenade."

Benserade, wholly disconcerted, regarded

garded me with a stupid air, but made no answer. " Do you refuse me?" I replied.—" Ah!" exclaimed he, " can I, if you receive these flowers!" At these words, I accepted the bouquet, and Benserade, holding out one of his arms, I fastened round it the straw-band. The countess embraced me in a transport of joy; Bouteville and Coligny threw their arms round the neck of Benserade, whom we immediately carried out, in order that no time should be left him to reflect. I supported myself upon his arm; while the countess, Bouteville, and Coligny, walked before. I followed them with a triumphant air, highly delighted with my conquest, and the glory I had acquired. On our coming into the street, I perceived an extreme change in the countenance of Benserade. " What ails you?" said I to him, smiling. He

looked at me, and clasped my arm in his:" "Do not interrogate my reason," answered he, "but read my heart!" —This answer distressed me; I might have told him the same thing. In a short time, we entered on the promenade, and, in the middle of the great alley, we met a prodigious crowd collected in a group, applauding, with vehemence, while crying out:—"*Long live the king and princes, and no Mazarin.*" While we approached, Frontenac, perceiving us at a distance, came to inform us that this tumultuous joy was excited by Mademoiselle, who carried a fan, to which was attached a wisp of straw tied with a blue ribbon (blue was the colour of the party). The people, who surrounded us, invited us to cry *no Mazarin*, with which we complied. Benserade blushed, and was silent: I upbraided him with it. "I wish to break

break silence," he said, "if you deign to speak frankly." I was now caught in my own toils. It was impossible for me to oppose vanity to love. "If you think any farther confirmation of it necessary," I replied, "you have not then heard me?" On this positive declaration, Benserade, almost beside himself, cried out—"*No Mazarin.*" This was, indeed, an answer. Intoxicated with such success, I thought only of the effect which it would produce on our friends and the heroine of the Fronde. I was regarded in a manner so flattering, and Mademoiselle smiled on me with an air of such satisfaction, as convinced me I had acted a very brilliant part!—Benserade saw only me; he was happy and transported with joy. Nothing more was requisite to turn the head of a country girl of twenty. After walking half

an hour, Mademoiselle withdrew, on which we immediately left the promenade, to return to the house of the countess. On entering the street, Benserade noticed one of his friends in a carriage, who put his head out at the door, and who regarded him with the greatest astonishment. Benserade turned pale, and cast down his eyes. "How now!" said I, "do you repent already?" "Ah! would you bestow your hand as the recompense of a bad action, when it should be the reward of virtue! Can I only obtain your heart by being wanting in fidelity to my friends? When you shall reflect on my conduct, will it be possible for you still to esteem me?" These last words restored me to myself; I applied them to my own situation. The recollection of M. de *** presented itself to my mind, and I shuddered. . . . . Benserade remained

only

only an instant with the countess, and, as soon as he was gone, I shut myself up in my chamber, and, throwing myself into an arm-chair,—— "Great God!" I exclaimed, "what have I done? I have dared to dispose of myself, without consulting him who was my mother's and my benefactor—him, whom she left as my guardian, and destined to be my husband! . . . I have evinced a want of gratitude, and even of respect, for the best and the most generous of men! Had his delicacy not interfered, he might have already received my plighted vows. I sincerely betrothed myself to him—I have authorised his just hopes; he has never loved any one but me—nothing will console him for my ingratitude; and, in return for so much constancy and so many favours, I have made him unhappy! No, no . . . I have pledg-

ed my word, however, to Benserade, and embroiled him with the court and his own party—how can I retract? .. He dreads lest he suffer in my esteem, when I reflect on his conduct; but how much more reason have I to fear the loss of his, when he shall examine mine? In short, his birth is more distinguished than that of M. de ***; his fortune is, besides, much more considerable; will it not, therefore, be believed, that, in order to gratify my ambition, I have sacrificed a first engagement, which gratitude and respect for the memory of my mother should have made me consider sacred and inviolable?" This last idea fixed my resolution. I determined to write immediately to Benserade; I undisguisedly recounted to him my whole history; I even confessed that I loved him; I accused myself of imprudence and want of consideration: but

but I firmly avowed that I would only receive him to hear his just reproaches, to weep with him, and bid him an eternal adieu! As soon as the letter was finished, I sent it away.

When we have performed a praiseworthy action, we cannot retract, without rendering ourselves contemptible; and, however painful may be the sacrifice, it is not followed by repentance, not merely because the mind rests satisfied, but also because passion is extinguished with the loss of hope. Besides, I had not allowed any time for love to assume a tyrannic sway over my heart; it is always readily overcome in its infancy; it is only when we hesitate and deliberate, that it becomes dangerous. It always exerts the least influence over strong and lively characters. Benserade came, and began by loading me with

reproaches, and complaining of me with vehemence; he at last, however, became himself affected, and yielded to my reasons. I advised him to carry my letter to the queen mother, knowing that this princess, far from being vindictive, had always displayed sentiments indicative of generosity and clemency: it is particularly to this distinguished character that we owe the sincere reconciliation of contending factions, and the cessation of all hostilities.

Benserade rejected my proposition, and protested that he renounced, for ever, ambition, courts, love, and happiness. He spoke with sincerity at this moment, but in a few days afterwards he followed my advice. The queen read my letter, and readily pardoned a transient error, of which love was the cause and the apology. I saw Benserade no more; I married M. de

M. de ***, who has rendered me the happiest of wives; but if I had preferred the amiable and brilliant Benserade, to a sensible and faithful husband, I should have experienced every thing which the inconstancy of a fickle man could make me suffer from inquietude, anger, and jealousy. Benserade had been the worst of husbands; but, having repented the errors of his youth, he is now become a sincere friend. I saw him, for the first time, two years ago, and it was with a tender interest. I have settled in this place, and Benserade has also chosen it, in order to spend the remainder of his days near us. I can, without blushing, recal to mind our first connexion, and our friendship is yet strengthened by the remembrance even of a passion, which reason had the power to extinguish.

The duchess de la Valliere heard

this narrative with the most poignant grief; as she discovered in the history of Madame de *** a very great resemblance of her own.—— "Alas!" said she, to Benserade,— "why had I not the courage and virtue of Madame de *** —— why had I not the same respect for the commands of a dying mother! The unfortunate Marquis de Bragelone might have been still living. I might have been his wife, and now experiencing the inestimable happiness of which I see before me the representation! . . . I should now possess the esteem and admiration of him who sacrifices me, and loves me no more! . . . I should not now have suffered all those heart-rending sorrows which overwhelm a noble and delicate mind, and I should be easy respecting the future, which it is impossible for me at present to survey without horror!"

This

. . . . This melancholy conversation was interrupted by a flood of tears.— This unfortunate woman, constantly haunted by remorse, found in every event and circumstance of her life gloomy subjects of reflection. She had no longer any hope of enjoying happiness or tranquillity. She, at last, realized what she had always foreseen, that a virtuous mind, which has not fulfilled its destiny, is for ever devoted to misfortune. At the expiration of six weeks she returned to court. Lewis openly applauded the proof of friendship which she had given to Benserade, while in disgrace. This prince delighted in such actions. He possessed, in common with his grand-father, that elevation of soul, which in kings exalts all the generous virtues; and, by his approbation, and particularly by his example, he succeeded in rendering them national.

Madame

Madame de la Valliere, on her arrival at Versailles, was informed of strange news. After various fruitless efforts to carry off his wife, M. de Montespan had committed such odd and extravagant actions, that the king exiled him. This, which was the first tyrannical action of the king's, produced much astonishment at Versailles, and great indignation at Paris. To hear the king justly and universally censured, was, to Madame de la Valliere, a new source of chagrin, and, perhaps, the most sensible she had ever yet experienced. It was forgotten how much M. de Montespan had rendered himself an object of ridicule, by his manners, and so little worthy of esteem, by his character and conduct. He no longer appeared, in the eyes of the people, but as an injured husband; and, commiserating his fate, they beheld in

him

him only a victim of despotism. The duchess, grieved on this account, resolved to speak to the king. But, although weak and timid, when her own affairs were only concerned, and although always ready to sacrifice herself to the will of the king, she found no exertion necessary to address him, in the language of truth. Her heart, and the excess of her attachment, supplied her with all the resolution of which she stood in need. She immediately informed the king of all that was said at Paris, respecting the exile of M. de Montespan. The king never interrupted those who spoke to him in private, however disagreeable might be the subject, or even the persons to whom he listened. This prince, although commanding respect in public, displayed, in private conversation, the most engaging affability, tempered with serenity and patience.

patience. On such occasions his only object seemed to be, to embolden the speaker, and to comprehend the subject. Any individual was at perfect liberty to explain himself, and even to reason with the king, either with the view of exculpating himself from a false charge, or with the design of affording new information, and entering into useful explanations, on a particular subject.

Inspired with sincere and honest motives, every person was certain of engaging his attention, of obtaining his esteem, and a favourable decision. He listened patiently to Madame de la Valliere, and, when she had ceased speaking, he answered, with confusion, that he had been forced to punish the unheard-of insolence of M. de Montespan. He added, that he had exiled him, merely for his extravagant actions and conversation, which

which any other sovereign would have punished with much greater rigour. "It is true," replied the duchess, "he has committed many inconceivable follies; but folly interests every person, when it is produced by a sentiment of honour, and by a legitimate passion. M. de Montespan is not an estimable charaoter, and is not attached to his wife. He has, for a long time, entertained an intention of separating from her.—But with this the public are wholly unacquainted. What signifies the trifling talk of the public?—You are its master; but it is your judge: you have yourself given to it the right of being severe. The first heroic actions of kings, far from operating as an apology for their weaknesses, must be considered, on the contrary, as guarantees for the future, and are solemn pledges, given in the face of the

the universe, to proceed always, with steadiness, in the same glorious career.

"Their virtues afford an assurance of future benefits, and their example have greater influence than laws.—They cannot change without perjuring themselves, and without injuring their own authority.... Conceive, then, the painful astonishment that must be felt on beholding you, a ravisher, and an oppressor of a man, whom you despoil both of his wife and honour?......Ah! it is not you whom I accuse of such an action. No, I am certain your heart condemns and disavows it. Thank heaven, all the blame of it falls upon Madame de Montespan!"—"I will justify her," said the king, with an irritated tone. "You will not succeed in the attempt," replied the duchess. "Your character and hers are too well known, and

and this last action fills up the measure of the hatred entertained against her. As for myself, I, at last, hate her. She occasioned the first murmurs against you!.....I could excuse her perfidy to me; but how shall I pardon her for diminishing the public admiration towards you! She may bereave me of your love: provided she does not take away from you that of your subjects, I can suffer and die without complaining!.....Ah!" continued she, throwing herself at the feet of the king, "immolate me: I yield to it; but do not sacrifice your own glory. Preserve that inestimable treasure of heroes, the only subject of pride, and the sole consolation which is left me. Recal M. de Montespan!"....While uttering these words, she embraced the knees of Lewis, and bathed them with her tears. On throwing herself on the ground,

ground, her fine hair was disheveled, and fell back upon her shoulders.—This disorder, these tears, her attitude, her beauty, which seemed only produced to affect the soul, and which grief and weeping rendered still more incomparably affecting, all at this period recalled to the king's mind a recollection, which even his inconstancy had not been able entirely to dissipate, and which a sentiment, more durable than love, had tended to perpetuate. Love makes only a slight impression, while admiration and gratitude leave behind them traces that are indelible." Lewis, in imagination, saw before him Madame de la Valliere, in the cemetry of Chaillot!....He contemplated, with the most lively emotion, that affecting figure, which seemed still to be adorned with all the charms of innocence. He beheld, at the same time, his

his victim, and her whom he had adored !....This idea brought back the illusion of his former sentiments and tenderness, and pity reanimated his remorse. Confused, affected, and almost distracted, he could not restrain his tears. He raised up the duchess; and, pressing her to his bosom, said, in a stifled voice, " I hasten to sign the recal of M. de Montespan!"...." O! God!" cried the duchess, " I obtain from you this generous effort !"....." Yes," replied the king, pressing her hand between his, " Yes, you shall never speak to me in vain. That dear and fascinating voice must always be heard"... " I will never, then, forsake you," said the duchess, with passionate emotion!—" Promise it to me!"— " I solemnly promise. Henceforth I will excuse every thing.....I will be happy.....I will recal to mind this con-

conversation, and nothing henceforward shall ever trouble my repose and felicity."—"I proceed to obey you. I go to sign this recal; but it is for you; only for you!—and not on account of any foolish clamour, which could only exasperate me." Saying this, the king arose, and left her filled with joy and happiness. In an ecstasy of mind, she wrote the following letter, and dispatched it, by a courier, to Benserade:

"O! return! my friend, return! Every thing is changed. I am happy: return. What a revolution!... At last, he has exposed to me his whole heart!...I knew it!...I have told you that he deceived himself!—It was only an error of the imagination; but his heart!....Ah! be assured, he is always the same. I have ever found him so!....My friend!—the censures of the world were unjust.

just. M. de Montespan had committed actions, which merited the most severe punishment. The king wished only to punish his insolence. He has done it, and he now recals him. It was never his intention to prolong his exile....What greatness of character! What sensibility of heart does he not display!....You cannot reproach me any longer with timidity. I have spoken to him with a boldness which astonishes me, when I reflect on it. Can you believe it? I was hurried on, without respect, to throw out bitter reproaches against him, which were altogether groundless!......With what affability, with what goodness did he hear me!..... You know how attentively and patiently he listens!—Who ever knew better than himself how to appreciate the motives of actions, and the influence of zeal? Who ever was more worthy

worthy of hearing truth, and who ever received it with greater complacency? How great his knowledge and integrity!.....And with all that dazzling glory which surrounds him, what humility, what innate and majestic simplicity!.....We admire, we reverence him!—But who, my friend, ever succeeded in writing his eulogium?

"There is always something wanting in the character which they assign him: they do not sufficiently know him. How I could delineate him!—But who would believe me? A portrait, the model of which resembles no other, would appear to be merely the work of the imagination; and, could I myself display, in all their lustre, those eminent qualities which exalt him above all other kings? I can only exhibit an imperfect sketch of them; I can only admire their effects.

fects. I console myself on reflecting that his memory will be honourably commemorated by facts, by history, by the grandeur he imprints on this age, and which, doubtless, posterity will call his own. Yes, as we speak of *the age of Augustus*, our descendants will one day speak of *the age of Lewis the Great*. O! how I love glory, when it sheds a lustre around him! how splendid does it appear in my eyes, when I behold him encircled by it! . . . . . My friend—how strongly is his image impressed on my mind? how does my heart overflow with happiness! how I long to talk of him to you! to tell you he never before evinced so much tenderness and affection! . . . . I beheld him agitated and pale; his tears flowed; he trembled. Him! this hero, our sovereign, who braves, alas! all dangers! . . . . . . That hand, which holds

holds with so much steadiness the reins of a vast empire, the limits of which he has still farther extended—that powerful hand trembled in mine! . . . . Yes! it trembled! O! what a prodigy of sensibility! . . . And it is I who produced it! I alone! he told me so! . . . . Come, then—you will also speak to him. Why, did you leave him without explanation?—It was an error, my friend—he would have retained you. He always loved you—do not doubt it. Every one here regrets you, and no one can supply your place near me."

Benserade discovered in this letter as much candour and credulity, as enthusiasm and love: he immediately returned the following answer:

"Suffer me, Madam, to remain in my retirement. My attachment for you is still less suspected here than at court. This idea renders the abode

I have

I have chosen more dear to me. You may be assured I will always participate in your happiness; but, before congratulating you on that which you have depicted, I would wish to know whether Madame de Montespan is *dismissed.* Whilst she remains at Versailles, I shall not be tranquil. This inquietude may appear to you, if not odious, at least extremely unpolite; deign, however, to reflect, that I have lived fifty-four years, and that more than thirty of them have been passed at court."

After reading this billet, the duchess shrugged up her shoulders, saying, "it is but too true, that no one, but myself, knows the king!" . . . . . Lewis, in the mean time, faithful to his promise, signed, without delay, the recal of M. de Montespan; at the same time presenting him with fifty thousand crowns, which he had

the baseness to accept. The king re-visited Madame de Montespan, and again became enslaved by all the love which an affecting remembrance had suspended! . . . He recalled the scene which had passed between him and the duchess, only to repent that he had displayed so much sensibility: He feared she might indulge the hope of obtaining the sacrifice of Madame de Montespan; he resolved to dissipate this illusion, and, with this intention, as well as from some remaining embarrassment, he did not go to her house next day, which produced a painful surprise in the mind of the duchess. He waited on her in the evening of the following day, but he was accompanied by Lauzun and Beringhen. His air was cold and distant, until Madame de Montespan appeared, when he became animated and engaging, but did not bestow

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the slightest attention on the duchess. Madame de Montespan, on her part, behaved in the most rude manner to the duchess, not even attending to the common forms of politeness.— She never addressed her, but affected to be wholly occupied with the king, to whom she frequently whispered, with an air of mystery, or malignity. The duchess was confounded and hurt, by the conduct of the king.— She could not account for such a sudden change in his behaviour.— Her suppliant looks, in vain, sought those of Lewis. He dreaded them, and carefully avoided meeting her eyes. When he departed, the duchess rose to follow him, with the intention of speaking a few words to him at the gate; but Madame de Montespan ran between her and the king, saying to the duchess, in a voice of pleasantry, "I charge myself with

reconducting him, *even to the gallery of princes*, (it was the name of her apartments in the castle.) At these words the king went out laughing. Madame de Montespan followed, and the unfortunate duchess remained standing in a state of stupefaction near the gate! . . . . From this period the king, aware how justly he might be accused by the duchess of inconsistency and ingratitude, assumed towards her that kind of distance, which proceeds from an insurmountable embarrassment, and which is often so fatal in princes. Infatuated by his love for Madame de Montespan, he determined not to sacrifice her; without esteeming her, he was yet enchained by her beauty; subdued even by her vices and her passions of every kind, he took the resolution not wholly to break with the duchess, but, for the future, only to

to attend to her in public. He ceased to visit her in private; and, in place of going to her house every evening, with her favourites, he went only once or twice a week. On the intermediate days he publicly visited Madame de Montespan; who, in derision, invited the duchess to attend her select parties, saying, she would there see the king. Equally destitute of prudence as of modesty, she displayed, on all occasions, the most brilliant pomp. She gave fêtes and grand suppers. She received the ministers, and compelled them to fear her. She assumed, notwithsanding the detestation of the public, all that exterior respect, which is usually granted by the world to individuals who live in luxury, enjoy the favour of a sovereign, possess a turn for intrigue, and still more especially the power of doing mischief. She was never suffered,

fered, by the king, to intermeddle with political affairs. He attended himself too closely to business to admit of any interference in this respect. Besides the particular gifts she received, and almost all of them without the king's knowledge, she was contented to accept a number of smaller favours, not to collect around her minions, but to enrich herself.— She thought that, in a court, partisans, of an inferior class, were of no use to the mistress of a king, who, she well knew, could never be supported by the opinion or esteem of the public. On no occasion did she ever gratuitously exert her interest. She accumulated riches, by every means in her power, never satisfying any just demands against her. These she left to be settled, from time to time, by the king. Her magnificence effaced even that of the queens. By

turns

turns she flattered and deceived her friends, frequently sacrificing them to a jest, in order to amuse the king. She made her enemies tremble, destroying them by her gaiety, and covering them with ridicule. She disconcerted the austere by her arrogance, or by her sprightly sallies.—Her satirical disposition was not less formidable than her power. No one durst treat her with coldness or disrespect; and she boasted at having been able, of herself, to re-establish all the rights and privileges of a favourite, which the Duchess de la Valliere had suffered to fall into neglect.

Whilst Madame de Montespan thus plumed herself on the favour of the king, the Hotel de Biron was a desert!—The astonishment experienced by the unfortunate duchess suspended, in some degree, the grief she

would otherwise have felt. However evident might be the conduct of the king, it appeared to her an inexplicable enigma; and the injustice and ingratitude with which she was treated, was, in her eyes, altogether incomprehensible. She wept in silence, waiting for an explanation of this impenetrable mystery. "He will speak to me," said she: "it is necessary to listen before I accuse him!..." The forlorn state in which she was left emboldened Lauzun to discover a project he had long entertained in secret. Redoubling his assiduities towards Madame de la Valliere, he, at last, requested her hand in marriage. She heard him with surprise and grief: a single thought struck her, on this proposition, from the most intimate favourite of the king. "Are you, then, certain," said she, weeping, "that he no longer loves

me, and that he has renounced me for ever?—Lauzun, always well received by the duchess, on account of his connexion with the king, had flattered himself she would consent to his wishes, and boasted of it beforehand among his friends. His enemies, therefore, profiting by his rejection, endeavoured to injure his character, and render him ridiculous, which was the more blameable, since they well knew love was not the motive by which he was actuated. The affairs of Lauzun were deranged, and his debts immense: he was, therefore, accused of having voluntarily sacrificed his honour to a more pressing interest. Madame de Montespan, who hated Lauzun, asked him one day, in a large company, how long he had been in love with Madame de Villiere. "From the period you became her confidant and intimate

friend," replied Lauzun. This severe reply disconcerted not Madame de Montespan, who always pretended to misunderstand whatever might create embarrássment, although it was carefully treasured up in her memory.— "You have evinced, then," said she, "that it is not, as has been supposed, impossible to conceal an ardent passion, since yours for the duchess was never suspected."—"Nor was it necessary," replied Lauzun, "that I should be in love, in order to espouse her!"—"By what motive, then, could you be actuated?"—"Why!" cried Lauzun, "to obtain the preference of the only woman, whom the king every truly loved!"—This rejoinder ruined Lauzun, but it saved his honour. Enthusiasm can excuse, or palliate every thing, when it is in consonance with the known character of the individual. Madame de Montespan,

Montespan, confounded and silenced, for the first time in her life, vowed, at the bottom of her heart, to be completely revenged. It is well known with what dissimulation and patience she waited the proper opportunity to accomplish her diabolical purposes, and with what perfidy and success she, all at once, gratified her ancient resentments, and her ambition.

The Duke de Longueville, with sentiments far more interesting than those of Lauzun, was not more successful in the proposals of marriage which he made to Madame de la Valliere. He offered to retire from court, and relinquish all the favours Lewis had forced him to accept. "How!" said the duchess, tenderly, "do you still love me?"—"Ah! I have never ceased to adore you!"—"Alas! why are you the only man capable of constancy?"....On this natural exclama-

tion the Duke remained a few moments silent and confounded: after which he renewed his solicitations.—Madame de la Valliere rejected them, in such a manner as evinced her esteem for the duke, but with a firmness which deprived him of every hope. The duke, penetrated with grief, absented himself a long time from the court.

In the mean time, Madame de la Valliere, scarcely ever seeing the king, and not having been able, in the course of three weeks, to say a single word to him in private, became, at last, convinced, that she had lost not only his love, but his friendship.—Benserade, and the Duke de Longueville, having left the court, she had not near her a single true friend. At present, however, this was a subject of less regret than it would have been at any other time. She knew how much

much they would have condemned the king, had they witnessed the cruel treatment she received. In proportion as we have loved, the heart is wounded and afflicted, at being obliged to complain of the objects of its affections to another. To gloss over injuries, to excuse the most unworthy actions, and, when no apology remains, to search for concealed reasons to justify them; in short, to defend them with the most persuasive eloquence, and the most ingenious address, are artifices so natural to a mind in love, as to appear to proceed from instinct, and are, by no means, inconsistent with the greatest frankness and sincerity of character.—Madame de la Valliere wondered, and grieved in secret. Whenever she found herself alone, her tears flowed almost continually, and often unheeded. When she succeeded in

drawing

drawing off her mind from the sorrow with which she was oppressed, her heart still continued to feel!---One morning, seated opposite a picture of the king, by Rigaud, and which was a striking likeness, she fixed her eyes upon it, saying, "is this, then, all that remains to me?---Alas! pursued continually by this favourite object, I require not his image to remind me of what is always before my eyes!---O! thou, whose every feature evinces goodness, canst thou treat me with so much cruelty! It is no more thy love which I solicit, but thy friendship: canst thou refuse it me?---Thou madest me promise never to leave thee, and this is to banish me in a still more barbarous manner! What am I, here, without thee! What shall I become without seeing thee, and so near to thee?---Thou art only a few steps distant from

from me, and you forsake and forget me!---I remain in the place thou inhabitest, only to hear thy inconstancy spoken of, and to be a witness of it! What is, then, become of that feeling and generous heart which seduced mine? I can recognise it no longer: this is my greatest torment!---No; thou canst not be unjust or inhuman!---No; it is thou who knowest me not.---If thou knewest what I suffer; if I had been able to paint to you the excess of my love, thou wouldest have dried up my tears, and consoled me by thy confidence.---Is it, then, my tenderness thou fearest? Alas! knowest thou not that, without participating in my feelings, thou mightest have still satisfied me? I require only that thou wouldest listen to me; that thou wouldest fly me no longer. Come; and, at least, learn how ardently it is possible to love

thee: thou canst never know it far from me!---O, come! leave me not to be annihilated and die, when a single word, a single look from thee will re-animate me!

In the midst of these melancholy reflections, the idea of again leaving the court never once occurred to her mind. She no longer entertained the hope of surprising or affecting the king by her departure, neither was she supported by the expectation of being again recalled. She preferred the alternative of sinking, before his eyes, under the load of her misfortunes, to that of tearing herself from him, never more to be remembered. To silence the voice of reason, she incessantly repeated to herself the promise she had made to Lewis to remain always near him, as if his subsequent treatment had not wholly absolved her from this engagement.

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The depression she experienced produced, in her, the appearance of resignation: submitting to the most unheard-of humiliations, she abandoned herself to her fate. In short, she no longer combated a passion, which had assumed such a fatal empire over her heart. She wrote to the king, merely to complain of no longer seeing him, except in company. Her reproaches were mild and moderate; but love was apparent in every word of her letter. The king anxiously wished to preserve the friendship of this interesting woman, whose angelic meekness and generous character he always admired; but his new attachment did not permit him to visit Madame de la Valliere, until she should be completely cured of the passion with which he had inspired her. Then he was sensible, that he might restore to her all his former confidence,

confidence, and that she would prove to him a most sincere and valuable friend. He, therefore, conceived that it was essential to their mutual happiness to deprive her of the smallest ray of hope. With this view, and to free himself, finally, from all constraint, he unfeelingly determined to write to her on the subject. He positively declared, that, feeling a passion for another object, he no longer could return her attachment; and he conjured her to confine herself to friendship, the only sentiment which it would henceforth be in his power to grant her.

Although the duchess might have been long acquainted with the sentiments of the king, yet this answer produced no less surprise than pain. The cruel declaration it contained completely annihilated all hope of recovering his attachment, since the hand

hand of Lewis himself had traced the irrevocable decree! The unfortunate know well the prodigious difference which exists between the contemplation of an evil, however well founded such apprehensions may be, and the conviction of its reality!

The duchess was so overwhelmed by this last stroke, that she found it utterly impossible to write an answer. She shut her door, and passed twelve days in absolute solitude. Lewis sent to inquire after her, but he could not summon resolution, personally, to wait upon her. The duchess, although extremely hurt, at last recovered from her dejection. Indignation, although it did not enable her wholly to overcome her attachment, operated to produce a kind of pride. "He would despise me," said she, "if he knew, that, after such conduct, I could be so despicably weak

as

as still to cherish a passion so unfortunate!.....Let me, at least, preserve his friendship!"....This last idea supported her resolution. She reflected upon her situation; and resolved to adopt a new plan of conduct, which afforded to her mind much consolation. When the measure of our misfortunes is complete, indolence and inaction lead to despair. Nothing tends so much to assuage affliction as any extraordinary project, which occupies the mind, and particularly imposes upon us the necessity of exertion. Madame de la Valliere took the resolution of renouncing every species of pomp, confining herself to a fourth part of her income, and giving the rest to the poor. She sold, in twenty-four hours, the few diamonds and jewels that she still possessed, with the exception of the valuable bracelets, which had been the

the first gift of Lewis. She discharged one-half of her domestics, on whom she settled pensions. She exchanged the superb tapestry of her apartments, and all her magnificent furniture, for that of the most plain and simple kind. She caused to be removed from her saloons the lustres, the girandoles, and almost all the mirrors, retaining only the portraits of the king. In making these changes she consulted her own taste. Her noble and generous mind had always despised ostentation; but she reflected, with an inward joy, that this simplicity would recal to the king's recollection, the repugnance with which she had formerly received his presents, and the moderation with which she had enjoyed them. In short," said she to herself, "he will compare these apartments with those of Madame de Montespan. He will reflect,

reflect, in spite of himself, upon the difference of our characters!.... When all was thus changed in the spacious Hotel de Biron, the duchess wrote to the king. This letter was short, because it was cold and reasonable, and because she had employed much time in composing it. She informed him, that, after having well examined her heart, she discovered therein no longer any sentiments, but such as he desired; and that, she flattered herself, he might visit her without embarrassment; since, henceforth, she could see him without perplexity and emotion. This laconic and tranquil reply surprised the king; and, in cases like the present, astonishment is always mingled with a kind of secret vexation. It was known, that the Duke de Longueville, whose constancy rendered him interesting, had urged Madame de la Valliere to accept his

his hand: it was known that he had proposed to renounce the fortune which she held of the king: and, although he had hastily left Versailles, some persons, however, supposed that he had obtained the consent of the duchess, and that he had departed so precipitately, only to make the necessary arrangements for the marriage. All these ideas recurred to the king's mind; they wounded his pride, and rendered him extremely uneasy.

After a long interval, he now, for the first time, represented to himself, in her true colours, that charming woman he had sacrificed. She now appeared to him, as she always had been, young, beautiful, interesting, and formed to inspire that sort of faithful attachment of which the duke of Langueville had afforded so extraordinary a proof. Self-love excited a kind of repentance;—that tender and

and delicate heart, which had been lacerated and rejected, began to be appreciated, when it was supposed that it would escape, and be for ever lost. Under the influence of these internal feelings, the king sent notice to the duchess, that he would wait on her at seven in the evening, and that he wished to see her alone. The duchess summoned up all her courage, to receive the king calmly; and, the better to accomplish this purpose, she contrived that her daughter should meet him first. This idea suggested to her the making a last sacrifice, one which she could never have been induced to make, had she not hoped that it would produce surprise and emotion in the king. She gave to Mademoiselle de Blois, the bracelets that were so dear to her, and, with extreme anguish of heart, fixed them on the arms of her child.

On

On entering the Hotel de Biron, the king was struck with the change he every where observed. He immediately conceived that the sacrifice of all his presents indicated the marriage of Madame de la Valliere with the duke of Langueville. Wishing to find a reason to justify the uneasiness he felt, he said to himself, that he ought to have been consulted on this business; and this want of respect appeared to him inexcusable. He felt irritated, and particularly against the duke of Langueville. As soon as he came into the hall, Mademoiselle de Blois ran forward to throw herself in his arms, and at the same moment shewed him the bracelets she had received from her mother.—This wounded the king's pride, and confirmed his suspicion. Turning to the duchess, he said: "I confess, Madame, that all this astonishes me."

He pronounced these words with a grave and vexed air, and accompanied them with an emotion which rejoiced Madame de la Valliere. A moment's silence ensued, during which the king surveyed the new furniture. The duchess said, " I have given these bracelets to one of the objects you love the most. Were they not originally intended by you for such an object?" " Doubtless," replied the king, " and, for that reason, you ought to have kept them: but may I ask an explanation of the extraordinary change I perceive here?" " I would henceforth live in complete retirement: the splendour which surrounded me was useless: you know it always displeased me." " Instead of so vague an answer, I expected your confidence." Lewis pronounced these last words with hesitation, and a forced smile. " How?" said

said the duchess, with an expression of astonishment. "Why would you make a mystery of your intentions? I am informed that you are about to marry the duke of Langueville."—"And do you believe that?" exclaimed the duchess. Then drawing from her pocket a letter, which the Duke de Langueville had written to her, on leaving Versailles, she gave it to the king, who immediately read it.

This letter undeceived the king, but, at the same time, brought him back to his former state of indifference. He had now no victory to gain. The duchess, however, had remarked his agitation and discontent. She imagined that a strong emotion could proceed only from the heart. The movements of self-love were to her almost entirely unknown. She fell once more into her first illusion, respecting the sentiments of Lewis. She imagined, that, by patiently fol-

lowing the plan she had traced out for herself, she would, in time, recover all she had lost. Lewis promised to see her as often as formerly, and for some time he kept his word; but Madame de Montespan was almost always with him: far from being embarrassed by the contrast which her pomp formed with the extreme simplicity of Madame de la Valliere, she ridiculed it. She pretended that the duchess only wished to appear singular. "For my part," said she, "I wish to please, and draw the gay world around me. Mine is a more common plan than her's, but, at the same time, it is a better one."

Madame, who, since the return of the duchess, had quarrelled with Madame de Montespan, was the only person in the court who shewed an open dislike to her. Madame, who was high-spirited, and naturally sin-

cere,

cere, could not endure the haughty manners of Madame de Montespan, and still less her cutting sarcasms. She treated her with that indifference, which princes have the art of rendering more offensive, by making it appear to be merely the effect of a forgetfulness, of which it is impossible to complain. In order still more to offend the new favourite, Madame wished to conciliate Madame de la Valliere. She testified an interest in her situation, which affected the duchess, and these two persons began to understand and to love each other.

The king, who had formed the design of conquering Franche Comté, carried his plan into execution, even in the midst of winter. A terrible anxiety then withdrew the attention of the duchess from her particular causes of vexation, and repressed all

the torments of her jealousy. She no longer thought of any thing, but the dangers with which the king was surrounded. But her alarms were soon dissipated. This new war was, to Lewis, only a rapid triumphal march. In three weeks he conquered this fine province, and peace was the happy result of his brilliant expedition. During this campaign, the king wrote only a very short and cold letter to Madame de la Valliere, while Madame de Montespan received five or six couriers. She boasted of this, particularly to her rival, under the pretence of giving her news of the king and the army. Madame de Montespan celebrated the peace with brilliant fêtes. Madame de la Valliere sought, in secret, for opportunities to relieve the poor, and to deliver prisoners. It seems that glory, as well as fortune, gives to the mind and

and character a degree of independence, and a kind of frankness, which are rarely found without it. The sense of dignity it excites, seems to remove all disguise and restraint.—Prosperity does not always corrupt, but it never fails to disclose the real characters of men. Heroes, and successful adventurers, who appear to be changed by success, and by wealth, have frequently only thrown off a deceitful mask, or set themselves free from a troublesome restraint. Good fortune emboldens,---adversity represses; and it is because man has need of a rein, that the severe school of misfortune affords him the most salutary instruction.

In the midst of the universal rejoicings and eulogies, which this new victory and the peace excited, Lewis still shewed himself clement, generous, and sensible of the love of his

people; but he gave himself up, without restraint, to his taste for magnificence, for fêtes, and to his passion for Madame de Montespan. All Europe resounded with his praises. Not only the great poets and learned men of France, on whom he bestowed honours and riches, celebrated his exploits, and his glory; but learned foreigners, on whom he conferred benefits, and the most flattering distinctions, repeated his praises in all the different languages of Europe.—If there was sometimes extravagance in those panegyrics, they were, at least, never either base or ridiculous. Gratitude rendered them respectable, and so much glory and success seemed to authorise them. History ought to be severe, because such is always the character of inflexible truth; but contemporaries, and in particular the subjects of good kings, should be grateful.

grateful. Have we a right to judge rigorously our benefactors? Public admiration is the recompence of great men. Let us not envy them for its possession. Its acquisition costs them much labour.

Lewis wished to exhibit, again, the spectacle of a tournament. The time was much changed. The king no longer wore, on his escutcheon, the emblem of the half-open rose. It was decorated with the colours of Madame de Montespan. A friend of that lady suggested a new device.—On a field of azure, a magnificent diamond star was surrounded by a multitude of silver stars. The motto was, *For the most brilliant and the most beautiful.* This emblem, though far from being flattering to the other ladies of the court, did not, however, offend against the general rules of gallantry. The spirit of chivalry au-

thorised the praises of a mistress, at the expence of all the women in the universe. Other manners have produced a different conduct in them; but so long as a man loves only one woman at a time, it is still common to make a kind of public profession of admiring only her. Inconstancy is not a new habit; but, at least, it was not then so generally foreseen. Men loved with illusion, and what more could be expected of them?

Shut up, during this tournament, in the Hotel de Biron, Madame de la Valliere painfully recollected those brilliant fêtes, of which she was formerly the object. What a frightful change! How was she to comprehend its cause; since, when she searched her lacerated heart, she still found there all the love that had produced her errors! The king, from this day, even in her presence, did

not dissemble his sentiments, and appeared occupied only with her rival. She had lost all hope of recovering her influence over him; but she was supported by the reflection, that she was giving him proofs of an unexampled and boundless devotion, and that Lewis would, at least, do justice to the sincerity of her attachment. She had no enjoyment, except in the opinion she supposed he entertained of her sentiments. "He loves me no longer," said she; "but he knows that no person in the world can ever love him, as I have done. Time and gratitude will, one day, restore to me his confidence and his friendship. If this should not happen until old age overtakes me, I shall still have some moments of happiness on the earth. An unexpected event, however, convulsed her soul, and overturned all the resolutions she had formed.

She

She had, for a considerable time, patronized a poor family, consisting of the widow of a gentleman of her province, and five children. She had made them come from Touraine to settle near her, and she went to Paris to procure a residence for them in the Faubourg St. Marceau. She found a house to let, which had a large garden that communicated with the garden of the adjoining house, by a private door: on going into the garden, she saw come from this door, a child, three years old, beautiful as an angel, and smiling as it ran towards her. The duchess was extremely fond of children; she took the infant in her arms, and looking at it attentively, was struck with its resemblance to the king. She was still examining the child with emotion, when a woman, upwards of forty, of a pleasing and noble figure, came also

also from the other garden, and advanced towards her with an expression of uneasiness on her countenance. This was Madame Scarron. The duchess knew her, though she had never spoke to her. She had met her several times in the galleries of Versailles, and she knew her to be the friend of Madame de Montespan. "What child is this?" said she, with a trembling voice, and looking stedfastly at the infant as she set it down. Madame Scarron blushed, said nothing, but making a low curtsey, took the child by the hand, and hastened away with it. She shut the door of the garden, and disappeared. The duchess was greatly astonished, and, on questioning the people of the house, learned that Madame Scarron was not known to them under her real name. They informed her, that she passed for the aunt of the child, which

which she educated with the greatest care, and that she besides lived in a very solitary and reserved style, and received no company. This singular mystery, the striking resemblance of the child, and the intimacy of Madame Scarron with Madame de Montespan, discovered the whole affair to the duchess. She easily divined that Madame de Montespan was also a mother, and that the child she had been caressing was her rival's and the king's. This discovery afflicted her nearly as much as if she had, until that moment, been ignorant of Lewis's infidelity. She was jealous as a mistress and as a mother; but she was particularly jealous of the perfect resemblance of her rival's children to the king. "Alas!" said she, "it was not enough for this artful and perfidious woman to rob me of the heart of the king, she must also

also deprive my children of the tenderness of their father! For his affection will now be divided! How proud must she be of that child, whose countenance already presents a resemblance so glorious and endearing, and which will so naturally dispose all hearts to love her! I could not help loving it myself, and would not, hereafter, be able to look upon it without experiencing a feeling of tender affection.—Happy infant!—Mine, alas! excite no recollection but that of my shame, for they resemble no one but their unfortunate mother!"

The heart of the duchess was too severely wounded, to suffer in silence the excessive sorrow she experienced. Having in her anger written to the king that she no longer loved him, she had certainly deprived herself of the right of complaining afterwards: she,

she, however, allowed her indignation to break out, and poured upon him all the reproaches which passion could inspire. Lewis listened to her with cold surprise. He accused her of levity and caprice: but that was nothing, compared with the unexpected and dreadful phrase which followed. He asserted that she never had any love for him. This unparalleled instance of ingratitude overcame the duchess with astonishment, and rendered her speechless. A convulsion of the universe would not have been to her a greater shock, would not have produced in her a more terrible surprise and stupor. Pale and immoveable, she looked wildly at the king. If a great injury is not instantly repaired, it is commonly aggravated: when no attempt is made to expiate, nor even to recognize its injustice, the torment becomes extreme,

treme, especially when this forbearance is not the effect of a blunted sensibility, but of a despair, or rather anger springing from remorse. At such a moment pity is not inaccessible to the heart, but it would give pain, and is therefore rejected.—"What!" said the duchess, at last, with a hollow voice, "have I not loved you?"—"No, I have never been able to triumph over your scruples." "It is true, that my principles were dearer to me than my life, and yet I sacrificed them to you."—"You did not; you never felt love." "Did I then sell myself from ambition?" This question, in the mouth of a person so noble and disinterested, disconcerted the king; but it was impossible to confound him without, at the same time, irritating him. "No," replied he, "ambition cannot govern characters that are destitute

of

of energy."—" By this maxim, you hope to excuse the vile and insatiable avarice of her you prefer to me?" " Madame de Montespan merits my attachment in return for the sincerity of her passion." " A more tender passion than mine." " A thousand times more real."—" Ungrateful man!" exclaimed the duchess, " can you address to me so inhuman a falshood, which all your recollections must disavow? Would you then rob me of all consolation? Dishonoured in the eyes of the world, and deprived of your love, I still thought I had not lost all. I was at least confident that it was impossible for you to compare the sentiments of any other to mine; yet now you have the cruelty to tell me that Madame de Montespan loves you better than I have done! Are all the sacrifices I have made then thrown away? Was it,

it, in your opinion, from insensibility that I consented to receive the visits of the woman who betrayed me? You have then set no value on the manner in which I have endured her pride, arrogance, and caprice? I have subdued my hatred, repressed my indignation, smothered my jealousy, concealed my grief and my love, without exciting your gratitude, or even your compassion: Virtue, reputation, self-love, dignity, repose, have all been immolated to you, and this is, at last, my reward. Ah! would it not have been better to drive me into exile? In the solitude of a desert I could have wept without restraint, and might have still said to myself, 'He looks in vain to another for the sentiments I entertain for him.' Alas! has that profound and tender sentiment been incapable of teaching you the nature of love? Can you be satisfied

tisfied with a heart, the ruling passions of which are ambition and vanity? You cannot have lost the recollection of my tenderness, without also forgetting how to love. Ah! my rival never can recal that soft affection to your heart." To these well-founded reproaches, the king replied only vaguely, and with a laconic coldness. He was too much misled to be moved by compassion. This conversation embarrassed him greatly, and he assumed a sort of authority to terminate it. He begged the duchess to spare him, in future, the trouble of scenes which were equally disagreeable and useless. "Yes," replied this unfortunate woman, while she wiped away her tears, "I shall henceforth preserve an eternal silence: I have nothing more to say to you."

This last behaviour of the king made a stronger impression on the mind

mind of Madame de la Valliere than any thing that preceded it could produce. A passion, which has existed for ten years, cannot be resigned in a moment. But, if it is returned only by ingratitude, a term arrives when the heart, at last, revolts and recognizes all its folly: this is the commencement of a cure. For the first time, the duchess formed a project more courageous than that of flying: She resolved to try to banish from her heart this unfortunate love. She had suffered so much from sensibility, she was so weighed down by misfortune, that absolute indifference seemed to present to her the only idea of felicity on earth. There is, certainly, more truth in this opinion, than in that which would persuade us, that an ardent passion can alone procure happiness. But what force is necessary to tear from the soul a violent

violent passion which is no longer shared! That hope, which springs up so readily when we love, must then be repressed. To produce a cure, all the wounds of the heart must be re-opened, by recollecting all that it is most desirable to forget. Every flattering prejudice must be surrendered, every indulgence renounced, and we must judge rigorously of proceedings and actions, which, before, were always favourably interpreted. Old habits must be resigned, and the mind must be condemned to reflect only on subjects which are calculated to produce despair, and to act only with energy against the strongest inclinations of the heart. Such is the price of the recovery of reason; how much less difficult is it to preserve it!

Madame de la Valliere retraced, with anguish, all the inexcusable proceedings of the king. In doing so,

she imagined it would be easy to detach herself from him; but how was she to persist in this resolution, when she reflected that he was now more worthy of being admired than ever? Every thing bespoke his glory. The arts, which he loved—painting, sculpture, music, poetry, all owed to him the most distinguished encouragement. He was, in a manner, their creator. A step could not be taken at Versailles, Marly, or Paris, without perceiving, every where, the marks of his grandeur, his taste, and his magnificence. Versailles displayed all the wonders of the arts. Its saloon and superb gallery were still more ennobled by the trophies of his victories. The delightful groves of Marly were formed, and the mechanical sciences produced a master-piece of workmanship to water and embellish them. The talent of Le Notre, animated

mated by the protection of Lewis, gave a majestic garden to the capital. Religion blessed Lewis in her temples, which he had reconstructed, repaired, or enriched. Thanks to his benefits, the sciences were daily improved: the Observatory was finished; and, while the foundation of the Invalid Hospital was laid, architecture prepared a palace, worthy of being inhabited by the chiefs of the French nation. The colonnade of the Louvre was raised. The powerful genius which presided over this reign vivified all things at once. He rendered France illustrious from one extremity to the other. He restored military discipline: he inspired Vauban to defend and guarantee our conquests. He gave new vigour to agriculture and commerce, by cutting immense canals, forming new roads, and filling the manufactories of Tours and Lyons. He founded colonies,

and

and created a formidable marine. Finally, he polished the manners of the age, gave a charm to society, and fixed the language, which served to celebrate all these prodigies, and which was destined to become universal.

How could the duchess feel indifference towards him who had performed so many wonders? Public enthusiasm constantly counteracted the painful operation of her reason. "Ah!" said she, "doubtless he has wronged me, but, since I am a French woman, how can I refrain from adoring him?" After some time had elapsed, however, she persuaded herself that she loved him less, and congratulated herself upon her victory: but a look from Lewis, or a word, which she would interpret according to her fancy, brought back all her natural sensibility: she would then give her-

self up to all the soft feelings of tender affection, and imagine she had made a fortunate discovery: but these passing illusions served only to make her feel with greater anguish her just causes of dissatisfaction and sorrow. She felt, in short, all the torments of jealousy. Her rival was not only adored by Lewis, but he believed that he was passionately loved by her alone!—Madame de Montespan thus usurped, at once, both the gratitude and the heart of the king! . . . . What heart-rending reflections, what anxiety to repent, this thought was calculated to inspire. Lewis, in ceasing to love Madame de la Valliere, had not lost the ascendancy which love had given him over her heart. He preserved all his former influence, which seemed to be even still farther increased by his indifference. The duchess had no longer the confidence which a cer-

tainty

tainty of pleasing always inspires: that happy equality, which is the never-failing effect of a reciprocal attachment, existed no longer between her and the king: she contemplated with pain, and, for the first time, the immense distance, which separated her from Lewis. Till then, she regarded his superior rank with admiration and enthusiasm, but it now produced in her mind only a feeling of inferiority. The manners of the king towards her became insensibly changed. The duchess, intimidated, and particularly discouraged by misfortune, suffered him to domineer over her from motives of fear and humiliation. When Lewis prepared to visit his newly acquired conquests, towards Dunkirk and Lisle, he confided the motives of his journey to the duchess. This proof of esteem transported her with joy; nothing

 compen-

compensates so much for the loss of love as confidence: it is a sentiment that may exist separately, and, perhaps, even exclusively, and which it is possible to flatter ourselves a favoured rival shall not obtain. . . . . . Lewis, wishing to detach England from the interests of Holland, employed Madame, secretly, to carry on this negociation, which his journey was intended to conceal. The pomp and splendour of Asiatic princes equalled not the magnificence displayed on the present occasion.—Thirty thousand men preceded or followed the king: some were destined to reinforce the garrisons, some to escort the royal family, and others to level the roads. The king led the way, with the queen, the princesses, and other distinguished persons belonging to the court: the Duchess de la Valliere and the Marchioness de

Montespan

Montespan were of this number. The king distributed munificent presents during his progress: gold and precious stones were lavished on all who approached him. Madame embarked at Calais, and Charles II. her brother, received her at Canterbury.

During the festivals at this interview, the princess fortunately terminated the treaty, which she carried back with her in triumph to Saint Cloud. As yet in the flower of youth and beauty, having reached the highest pinnacle of favour, and occupying the second place in a powerful empire, she looked forward to a long and brilliant career, and saw not the abyss open in which all her hopes, apparently so well founded, were for ever to be engulphed! An acute distemper soon brought her to the brink of the grave. She was not mistaken as to her situation: she was

sensible she must die within a few hours; and, banishing all the illusions which surrounded her, she threw herself wholly into the arms of religion. The king immediately hastened to her: the duchess de la Valliere, terrified and oppressed with grief, repaired also to Saint Cloud. Upon entering the apartment of Madame, she beheld this princess, still beautiful, but pale and languid, with her hair disheveled, on the bed of death, leaning upon the bosom of Madame de la Fayette, weeping, and holding a crucifix, which she stedfastly regarded. Bossuet was standing at the head of the bed. All the majesty of religion seemed diffused around the interesting figure of this august prelate:—he spoke not! Every one waited, in profound silence, and with reverential awe, the exhortation he was about to pronounce. The chamber was filled with

with the friends and attendants of Madame; when, suddenly awakening from his reverie, "What," exclaimed he, "is our existence?—Reflect seriously, Christians:—what is our life? Answer us, O death! for man, too proud, would not believe me . . . O! eternal King of ages, thy being, for ever invariable, neither rolls on, nor changes, nor is limited; but lo! thou hast made our days measurable, and my substance is as nothing before thee . . . O God! once again, what are we? If I look forward, what an infinite duration extends in prospect; if I look backward, what an awful succession of ages, in which I had no existence! and how little do I occupy in this immense abyss of time! . . . . Nay, even while we stand assembled here, and while we believe ourselves stationary, every thing hastens on, every thing recedes, since, of all the

objects of earthly affection, each insensibly advances to a final disjunction."

At this lively and striking image, Madame de la Valliere shuddered, and, throwing her eyes, bathed in tears, on the king, her mind became so strongly affected, that she was obliged hastily to retire into an adjoining apartment, being no longer able to command her emotion. She entered the dressing-room of Madame. "God!" said she, falling into a chair, "what a picture! . . . This princess, yesterday, and even this morning, so young, beautiful, and fascinating, is about to die, and disappear for ever from the face of the earth!" On saying these words, the duchess threw her eyes on an elegant toilet, which stood opposite her. "Alas!" continued she, "a few hours have only passed since this mirror

reflected

reflected her beautiful visage, yet glowing with all the freshness of youth and health! . . . this countenance, even now covered by the shades of death! . . . and these flowers, prepared to adorn her this evening, in spite of their fragility, will out-live her! . . . No, they shall fade before her." At these words, the duchess took the roses from a vase in which they had been placed on the toilet, and stripped them entirely of their leaves. Whilst her tears flowed, and fell on the scattered rose-leaves, her attention was still directed to the toilet, on which she perceived a billet, sealed up, and directed to herself.—She shook on opening this letter, which was dated on the morning, and in which Madame requested her to attend, in the evening, a fête, which was to be given at Saint Cloud. "O what a fête!" exclaimed the duchess;

"what shall we behold? Great God! —Instead of a brilliant illumination, mourning tapers!—in the hall prepared for the dance, a coffin!—and, in place of a ball, a funeral!" The billet of Madame concluded in these words: "Come at an early hour; you will find me alone; I have important projects to communicate to you." "Ah!" replied the duchess; "*projects!*—what folly to form them, even for the evening of the day in which we exist in all the lustre of youth! Unfortunate princess!—these projects, so important to thee, this morning, must now appear frivolous; nay even, perhaps, culpable, in the near prospect of eternity!" At this moment they came to inform the duchess that Madame was about to receive extreme unction. She re-entered the chamber, where Bossuet was still speaking; after which,

with her heart and mind equally affected, she left Saint Cloud, followed by those salutary reflections which were soon to produce such an astonishing revolution in her sentiments.

Madame expired at five o'clock in the morning. The duchess attended the funeral oration pronounced over this princess, by Bossuet. Her enthusiasm for this incomparable orator led her constantly to listen to his sermons, and she could never sufficiently admire the courage and eloquence with which he dared, before the king, to condemn war and conquest, and, before the courtiers, pride and ambition. One day, she could not avoid starting, when she heard him exclaim, "Yes, yes, I will come to you, O sinners, with all the force, all the light, and all the authority of the gospel." She redoubled her attention, but listened trembling. Her heart

heart was moved and palpitated, when he pronounced these words:

"A sudden and penetrating light illuminated the eyes of Madelaine; a pure and celestial flame began to burn in her heart; a voice from the bottom of her soul, by reiterated calls, urged her to penitence and repentance." At these words, the duchess clasped her hands, and raised her eyes to heaven, shedding a torrent of tears!

Returning to her house, she meditated on this passage. "O brilliant and terrible light," cried she, "I will no longer shut my eyes against thee! O divine voice! too long despised,—speak,—I will, at last, listen! Ah! I know well the dreadful sacrifice thou wilt prescribe! but I cannot cease to love without a miracle:—perform it, O God of holiness! since thy power is omnipotent. Tear from my agitated and wounded heart this

culpable

culpable passion, over which neither pride, reason, nor even ingratitude can triumph: the most bitter sorrows are insufficient to inspire me with courage to emancipate myself from its dominion: I am accustomed to misery: those who have long loved with ardour, become familiar with suffering! .... It is by the aid of a supernatural power alone, that I can resume an empire over myself. Ah! if it is necessary, to enable us to resign life with fortitude, is it less so to afford strength to dissever ourselves from an object to which we have devoted our existence? What! .... I could be able to see, without emotion, this hero, who constitutes the happiness and the glory of my country: I could hear him praised, without emotion, and remain at a distance from him, without despair: I could consent that another felt for him more tender sentiments

ments than mine! . . . Incomprehensible revolution! . . . . Ah! religion alone could be able to produce it!"

Shortly after the death of Madame, the king over-ran and conquered a part of Holland. It was on his return from this expedition, loaded with glory and honour, that Lewis XIV. received from the gratitude of his subjects, the surname of *the Great.* Some days before his return to Versailles, the Duchess de la Valliere was invited, by the Maréchale de Bellefonds, to proceed to Paris, in order to attend the ceremony about to be performed at the convent of the Carmelites, on her eldest daughter taking the veil. This renunciation of the world, this magnanimous contempt of fortune and wealth, was not a rare occurrence at that period, even amongst young persons of the highest rank. On such occasions, the friends and

and relatives of the novice never failed to witness the performance of a ceremory which piety rendered so truly interesting. The duchess, during her stay at Paris, took up her abode at the house of the Maréchale de Bellefonds; but, although she was not more attached to her than formerly, she yet felt much satisfaction in residing with a family, the head of which was one of the most virtuous men of the court. The Maréchal de Bellefonds, joined to the most sincere piety, great military talents and a lofty mind. Like all enlightened and religious men, he possessed austere and inflexible principles, but tempered with mild and unaffected charity: he knew the situation of the duchess, and, affected by her natural good qualities, her mildness, and even by the culpable passion which had produced so much misery, he pitied her fate,

fate, and, since the exaltation of her rival, had rendered her several services. The duchess, on her part, entertained for him the most profound respect, and felt herself disposed to bestow on him the most unlimited confidence. Conducted by the Maréchale, she repaired to the convent of the Carmelites, which she had never before visited, and was introduced at first into the church for the nuns. She loved Mademoiselle de Bellefonds, who, at the age of twenty-two, added to the most exalted devotion, all the graces of her age. Affected, and even agitated, by the idea of the solemn ceremony about to be performed, the duchess could not enter the church without an emotion, which became almost insupportable, as soon as she advanced a few steps. . . . At the sight of the choir of nuns, a former thought recurred to her mind,

and

and made a strong impression on her imagination. . . . She grew pale, and believed this was the church which she had formerly seen in a strange dream, now before her. . . . On each side were the same number of stalls: the gothic ornaments in the wainscoting, the painted glass, and the form of the windows, were also perfectly similar. . . . But the mysterious gallery ought to be raised and placed over the porch. . . . . The duchess turned about and discovered it! . . . The grate was half open, and the forlorn duchess expected to see the majestic phantom appear, which, in her dream, presented her with a veil of dazzling whiteness! . . . It seemed to her as if she heard these words repeated: "*Here only shalt thou find repose and tranquillity!*" . . . . This was no longer to her an illusion, or even an indefinite and confused prediction;

diction; it was a real and urgent invitation; it was heaven manifesting itself by a positive order! . . . It must be obeyed! . . . The idea of a miracle, exalted and filled her mind with enthusiasm; but it was no less depressed by the sudden and terrible reflection of an eternal separation! . . . She experienced all the oppression which the approach of an unforeseen and certain death could produce, of which the horror could only be subdued by the most ardent faith, and by all the consolations of religion. . . . . . She yielded to this conviction with transport, yet her heart was lacerated . . . . "God calls on me with an imperious voice. The fatal instant is arrived." She no longer remained in doubt and uncertainty, but her love continued unimpaired! . . . She stopt, and fixing her wild eyes, moistened with tears, on the gallery: "O God!" cried she,

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"it is not an enfeebled sentiment which I am to immolate; it is a passion stronger than ever that I sacrifice." . . . . At these words, her knees bent under her, a frightful paleness overspread her visage, her eyes closed, and, appearing as if entranced, she fell senseless into the arms of the Maréchale de Bellefonds. On carrying her into the hall of the community, she recovered her senses, and her courage was revived on beholding Mademoiselle de Bellefonds, that young interesting person, who, having no subject of self-accusation to embitter her reflections, was, with so much joy and serenity, about to pronounce an irrevocable vow! . . . The Maréchale never reflected on things she did not instantly comprehend; but rashly concluded them to be capricious or ridiculous, and thought no more of them. She had given little

tle attention to the extraordinary words Madame de la Valliere had uttered before she swooned; but the nuns were sensibly struck with them. They anxiously questioned the Maréchale, who simply replied, that the duchess was extremely subject to the vapours. It was thus that she always spoke of persons having romantic notions, or endowed with unusual sensibility.

When the time approached for the performance of the ceremony, they returned into the church. The attention and emotion of the duchess were wound up to the highest pitch. She identified herself with her, who abjured for ever the world, her pleasures, and her passions. Her heart beat with violence, when Mademoiselle de Bellefonds pronounced her vows....She took, internally, the same oath!...We never assume any prompt

and extraordinary resolution, without experiencing the need of a friend, to whom we can communicate it. It is an enjoyment, founded on self-love, which continues, even when every other has been renounced. Madame de la Valliere first imparted her design of retiring from the world, to the Maréshal de Bellefonds, who advised her privately to consult Bossuet on the subject. The candour of Madame de la Valliere being so well known, Bossuet could not question her sincerity. In the mean time, however, he observed her to be so much under the influence of passion, and her heart torn by so many regrets, wholly incompatible with the resolution she had taken, that he conceived it his duty to combat it, by every argument in his power. She replied to all his objections, weeping, but with firmness; and, after a long conversation,

conversation, Bossuet enjoined her only to weigh well the subject, and to reflect on it, for six months, without imparting her design to any one. She promised compliance, and kept her word. The exercise of this discretion cost her dear. She longed anxiously to inform the king of her resolution. She enjoyed, by anticipation, his astonishment, and that she should yet receive the expression of some regret, and, perhaps, a few tears....

More silent and submissive than ever, the duchess, braved by Madame de Montespan, neglected by the king, supported with sublime patience the indifference of Lewis, the disdain, the haughtiness, and insulting caprices of her rival. To her mildness were superadded a serenity and resignation, which gave her the air of insensibility. Mankind are ever too ready

ready to conclude those unsusceptible of feeling, who endure evil with fortitude. They withhold their compassion, when it should be mingled with a sentiment of astonishment and admiration. It seems as if we exacted that compassion we solicited. We must implore, in order to obtain it. We grant it only to those who complain. Religion inspired the duchess with a courage, which surprised herself. Her feeling and generous mind was spontaneously elevated towards that Supreme Being, the eternal source of goodness, love, and clemency.—Her repentance, more poignant than ever, far from possessing its former bitterness, afforded her real and genuine consolation, by assuring her of forgiveness. She enjoyed even the involuntary sorrow she felt for her unfortunate passion, since it gave to her sacrifice of it a greater value.

She supported, with a dignified tranquillity, her disagreeable and painful situation. She was about to expiate her errors, emancipate herself from shame, and withdraw herself, for ever, from the slavery of the court. With the destruction of her hopes, her jealousy had also expired; and, disengaged thenceforth from turbulent passions, if love could still have affected her, at least her heart was no longer torn and agitated by feelings of hatred and resentment.

One of the most happy effects of a lively and sincere piety, is to deliver us from the frivolous disappointments produced by ambition, or by vanity, always restless and dissatisfied. When our false views are corrected, almost every thing which interested us in life, loses its importance; we are no longer disconcerted by mistakes, and our character re-

mains

mains unshaken by the obstacles we may encounter. In short, we have reached the summit of true philosophy. We cease to be agitated by trifles; are aware of all the childishness of pride; we make no more vain pretensions; we are indulgent, because we have attentively examined our own hearts, endeavoured to become acquainted with ourselves, and to judge our own actions, not only without partiality, but with a severity which, in forming our opinions respecting others, might be justly reckoned intolerant; we are tranquil because no longer irresolute; we are guided by an unerring rule; animated by exalted thoughts; supported by sublime hopes: in short, we enjoy an inestimable happiness, that of being always in harmony with ourselves, and of pressing towards the end of our desires, with the complete cer-

tainty of attaining it. Happy career! in which emulation can never produce jealousy; in which those who surpass us, far from exciting envy, obtain from us the most heart-felt veneration; and in which we proceed, without displaying any rivalry or competition, followed and admired by those who are more weak, and uniformly urged forward by those who are stronger than ourselves!....

The six months which had been prescribed by Bossuet to Madame de la Valliere for reflection and self-examination, was passed by her in the exercise of the most fervent devotion. Over this, however, she threw a veil of mystery, being unwilling yet to divulge the resolution she had taken; afraid lest she might be accused of hypocrisy. Of all the humiliations attached to the indulgence of long continued errors, the most cruel, perhaps,

haps, is that of not being able to relinquish vice without incurring a suspicion of dissimulation; wherefore, in our return to virtue, extreme rigour of conduct, by destroying every doubt of our sincerity, is less difficult to perform than moderate resolutions. Madame de la Valliere would have blushed to have been surprised in her particular acts of devotion, and she experienced the most lively impatience to render public her intention of becoming a carmalite. This time at length arrived; and the duchess, finding herself one day alone with Lewis, determined to speak to him on this subject, but it was with extreme distress. Not having foreseen the embarrassment she experienced, her emotion increased; the king listened to her with surprise; he appeared affected, and the duchess burst into tears. Lewis then endeavoured to combat

such an extraordinary design, but it was with a feebleness of expression which quickly dried up her tears. She replied, with firmness, that her resolution had been long since taken, and in such a manner as not to be shaken. After a moment's reflection, the king conjured her to choose, at least, a less austere order, and he offered her the richest convent of France.... "Ah!" cried the duchess, "how could I be able to conduct others, after having lost myself!—Alas!" continued she, "in giving myself to you I was not actuated by ambition; have you forgotten this?—and shall I, in renouncing you, conceive ideas of vain glory and domination!"—The king no longer opposed her determination, but he exacted a formal promise that she would remain another year at court. She was obliged, although with regret, to yield obedience

obedience to an authority she had never disputed: but the very same day, not dreading to pledge herself in such a manner that she could no longer retract without incurring considerable ridicule, she publicly declared her intention to retire, and her irrevocable determination to enter into the convent of the Carmelites. With the exception of the Maréchal de Bellefonds, all her friends were afflicted, and endeavoured to shake her resolution. It afforded a continual subject of irritation to the duchess to be obliged to hear repeated, without ceasing, all the trite and common place arguments against a religious life. She justly replied to them, that, having determined more than six months ago to consummate this sacrifice, she had examined the reflections they now presented to her.— The zeal of friendship was not parsimonious

monious in urging all the trifling arguments in their power on this subject, and she was fatigued by attending to her particular friends, as well as many acquaintances, who combated her vocation by the same reasons, and almost always in the very same words. Benserade hastened to Versailles, with no other intention but to converse with Madame de la Valliere on a project he had dreaded much. Among other things, he observed to her, that, without entering into such an engagement, she might live with as much regularity as in a convent, and that it was her duty to remain in the world, in order to edify it.—"Ah!" replied she, "after the scandal of my own life, it would be a strange presumption to believe I could edify others!"

The conversion of Madame de la Valliere excited a considerable interest

rest throughout Paris, but produced almost no sensation at court, because it was not generally believed. By some it was said she would never, at twenty-eight years of age, have the fortitude to make such a sacrifice: others pretended that she had given out this strange resolution in order to soften the king, and with the hope of re-animating his former sentiments. This was secretly the opinion of Madame de Montespan, although she pretended, on this occasion, to place the fullest reliance in the sincerity of a rival that she still feared, with a view, not only to render this idea more familiar to the king, but also to make it more difficult, or at least ridiculous in Madame de Valliere to retract her resolution.

The duchess, in the mean time, insensible to the opinions of the courtiers, acquired every day new strength

from the discourses of Boussuet. What an impression was made by the sublime exhortations of this great man on her noble and sensible soul, so well pre-disposed to receive them by the most poignant and bitter remorse!... The duchess listened with avidity to this powerful voice, which incessantly encouraged virtue, made vice tremble, and thunderstruck impiety; this voice, the august organ of truth, to which no one can attend without advantage, and without astonishment!... Madame de la Valliere was entirely guided by his counsels, and those of the Maréchal de Bellefonds; to the last of whom she wrote daily when he was at Paris. One of these letters concludes thus:

"God is so bountiful, that he has vouchsafed to me infinite consolations in a variety of different ways, and I am every moment so strongly inflamed

inflamed by his love, that I burn with an ardent desire to give myself up to him without reserve!—What grace! and how little have I merited it! . . . . Ah! doubtless, the complete devotedness which is required of me, cannot be sufficient to acknowledge his favours and repair my offences! I perceive, however, notwithstanding the enormity of my guilt, love has a greater share in my sacrifice than the obligations I am under to penitence."

Madame de la Valliere had, for several years, led a kind of solitary life, so that, without the appearance of singularity, she was able to consecrate almost all her days to meditation and piety. She still, however, appeared occasionally at court. One morning, the king going to hunt with a large company, passed before the Hotel de Biron, and stopping, sent a request to the duchess to accompany them, as-

suring her, they would not remain longer than the time usually employed in taking a walk. She consented, and ascending, without thought, the first carriage which presented, found herself in a small gondola along with Madame Scarron, and she saw before her the king seated in a chariot by the side of Madame de Montespan. She required all her christian humility to support her present situation. It was strange to find herself thus in public, in the suit of the king and his mistress, along with a person at that time in a subordinate situation, and the confident of Madame de Montespan.—The duchess was far from suspecting that this obscure female, protected by her rival, would one day avenge her, and reign legitimately over France! . . .

Madame de la Valliere was at first silent, but her companion talked with

so much grace and good sense, that she not only drew the duchess out of her reverie, but succeeded in interesting her. The conversation soon turned on the proposed retreat of Madame de la Valliere; and Madame Scarron disapproved particularly of her choice of the convent of the Carmelites. "How will you be able to accustom yourself to such severities," said she. "Ah! Madame," replied the duchess, pointing, at the same time, to the chariot of the king, "if I find any hardships, I have only to recal all the misery which these two persons have made me suffer!"

In the mean time, the Countess de Themines, the faithful friend of Madame de la Valliere, wrote, in order to conjure her to prefer a retreat in Touraine, to the convent of the Carmelites. She added, that, in a very few months, she would again see her, with

with the hope of carrying her along with her; to which Madame de la Valliere made the following reply.

"Your friendship leads you to regard only the rigour of my sacrifice, but it overlooks all its consolations and advantages. Ah! what is it to me to abandon a world that I never loved, and to renounce idle amusements of which I am become tired? I devote myself to obscurity; but how much ought I to hate celebrity, which has caused my shame, and overwhelmed me with sorrow! . . . . . What merit can I claim in embracing poverty, since I have uniformly despised pomp and riches? Even before that religion had enlightened my mind, my situation and passion secured me from the intoxication of false pleasures: pomp, fortune, honours, were considered by me but as badges of my shame! Surrounded by affluence

and

and dignities, I sighed after solitude; I longed for humble mediocrity! . . . I make, therefore, but one sacrifice,—it is immense, it is true:—I abandon for ever what I love! . . . Judge, by this effort, the influence of the sentiment which determines me. . . . One reason called on me to retire . . . . I was no longer beloved! . . . But, after having triumphed over such a passion, what would become of me without religion? . . . What a melancholy victory, could it only be purchased by an insipid indifference! . . . Ah! this feeling heart can then, at last, without a crime, love to excess, and fix itself in repose! . . . O what repose is found in a dignified sentiment, to which we can resign ourselves with all the vivacity of our imagination, and all the energy of our soul! How exquisitely delicious are my reveries! and reflection cannot destroy their

their charm ! . . . Nothing is illusory in virtue,—all is real, all is durable in the happiness which it procures : its benefits and pleasures are inexhaustible; habit and perseverance enhance their value, because they augment their excellence. . . . . Yes, religion alone can temper the bitterness or the horror of the most painful recollections ! She effaces the past, she embellishes the present, she charms the future ! . . . The future ! I contemplated it only with terror ! Thank Heaven, it is no longer formidable ! I have torn off the dismal veil which concealed it from me. I now behold and survey it with delight ; all my desires and passions dart towards it : but I enjoy the interval of time that separates me from eternity : I prepare myself for a glorious, an immortal destiny ! . . . Ye great ones of the earth, unfortunate victims of the time

which

which devours you, you agitate and torment yourselves, for the frivolous interests of a moment: far from envying, I lament you! While pursuing, with ardour, so many imaginary pleasures, you also hasten, with rapid strides, towards the tomb: it yawns before you; in vain you turn away your eyes; you obtain a glimpse of it, in spite of the errors which seduce you; and this inevitable object presents to your mind nothing but a frightful abyss! . . . As for me, notwithstanding the feebleness and timidity of my sex, I can view death without dismay:—what do I say!—it is daily the subject of my sweetest meditations:—I shall see the dream of youth vanish, in like manner as we behold the closing of a stormy day:—to a religious mind, the decrepitude of age appears only as a tranquil night, succeeded by an enchanting

morning!—

morning!—You tell me, my friend, that I ought to remain free, and lead the life of a recluse; you add, that then I might be useful. This scheme, however, is chimerical, or at least its execution would be extremely difficult and painful: in order to perform severe duties with regularity, we require to have examples set before us: when every one proceeds around us in an uniform manner, when we all hasten with equal zeal towards the same end, we are insensible to our own exertions; we should blush to slacken them: emulation supports our strength; it maintains the ardour of our first impulse. Alas! example alone can hurry us on to vice: what must then be its power, when it beckons us to pursue virtue? Reflect, moreover, that, by embracing a religious life, I can be infinitely more useful to the unfortunate, than by remaining

maining in the world; since, by the absolute renunciation of all my wealth, I shall be enabled to bestow more of it upon them. How unjust, then, and false is the opinion which affirms that those who shut themselves up in cloisters, are as useless and unserviceable as they are completely indolent. Is it for men of the world to cry out against the waste of time? They who, even when their manners are simple, consume it, in pursuing amusements either puerile or dangerous! Ah! when shall I be received into that holy asylum in which I wish to spend the remainder of my days, and expiate, at the same time, the errors and inactivity of my past life! I shall no longer misemploy the faculties of my mind and heart; I shall no longer profane my sensibility; reasonable or beneficent motives shall henceforth only

only guide my conduct, and my activity shall no more be exerted, but in the cause of virtue! Respectable state, in which I shall be compelled, in conformity to the general law, to pray only to God, or serve my companions; to labour only for religion, or the poor; to watch only, in order to chant the praises of the Most High, or to attend the sick! . . . O my God! it is then that I shall enjoy the existence which I owe to you; that I shall employ, worthily, and without pride, all the gifts you have bestowed on me! In the world, christian regularity appears almost a prodigy; in the cloister, it is only a simple duty: it is there alone that perfection of conduct is not incompatible with humility.

"You express astonishment that I can renounce the happiness of living with my children. Alas! my tenderness even for them, would, of itself, operate to confirm my resolution! They

They shall not blush for their mother: she will have repaired her errors! I shall merit their esteem! My faults shall not corrupt my daughter: she will judge of my regret and remorse by the extent of my sacrifice. I derive this advantage from the magnitude of my fault, that it enables me to give her the most striking of all lessons! By consecrating myself to God, I shall require all the rights of maternity; unworthy of guiding my daughter while remaining near her, I shall instruct her youth from the depth of my solitude; it is only with a blush that I dare in this palace speak to her of virtue; but it will be allowed me to receive her in my cloister, and there, retired in my cell, I shall impress upon her mind her duties, with energy and with authority. Should I find it necessary to suggest to her that love and pomp cannot

cannot compensate for the loss of innocence, that grate which must for ever separate me from the world, that sacred veil which is about to conceal me from all eyes, will be more persuasive than the most eloquent speeches! Convinced that one day I shall be regretted by my daughter, it appears that I still love her better, and that she is yet dearer to me on that account!—Doubtless, for the last six months, I have not seen my children without being deeply affected! . . . But if the resolution I have taken had nothing in it painful, how could I be reconciled with heaven and myself? I have given the most scandalous offence; I owe, therefore, to all Europe, an exemplary instance of expiation and atonement! . . . Yes, I shall be daily deprived of the happiness of seeing or waiting upon the objects of my affection! . . . There is one

one of them whom I shall never again behold! . . . . His name shall no more escape my lips! . . . But that will not cost me much. What should I gain by choosing a convent less austere, could not I therein support the same constraint? Would it be lawful in me to speak of him? . . . I shall always, however, pray for his happiness and glory, with all the zeal of well-grounded faith! . . . O! how consoling and sublime is christian charity! it secures us from oblivion; and, by recollection and past vows, re-unites us even to those objects from which religion separates us! . . . .

"Do not then complain, my friend. Reflect on the evils from which my retreat must secure me. Reflect that ingratitude will no longer be to me a source of tears!...Ah! It was when I had no sway over myself that I merited all your compassion. What have

have not love, remorse, shame, and jealousy, made me suffer!---How dreadful was it to reflect, that all those whom I revered; all those, whose good opinion I ambitiously coveted, would despise me!....How delightful it is to escape from a tedious humiliation, to recover the esteem, and obtain the approbation of those whom we have never ceased to admire!.... Alas! I must ever mourn over my errors, on this side the grave. I can no longer be ranked in the class of unfortunate females. My history cannot be considered as holding out any incentive to vice. It must interest all feeling and virtuous minds. They will learn from it, that weakness produces evils of every kind; and that all consolation, a glorious victory, and peace of mind, are the happy fruits of sincere repentance. Adieu, my friend!---Come: I impatiently

patiently expect you. What pleasure shall I experience on again seeing you! I will no more blush in your presence! The remainder of my days shall justify your true friendship. Come: not to combat a magnanimous resolution; but, on the contrary, to approve it, and to applaud sentiments which cannot be shaken."

This letter expressed, with simplicity, the internal peace, of which the duchess had begun to taste the charm. As her conduct was tinctured with no kind of affectation, and as she no more spoke of her design, it was generally believed, at the end of a few months, that she had altogether renounced the idea of retiring. Even the king himself thought so; and it was with the greatest pleasure that he conceived he was secure of such a sincere friend.

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For several months different circumstances had concurred to display to him the true character of Madame de Montespan. He had become indifferent towards her; and, although he had not recovered all his former ardent love for Madame de la Valliere, yet the vexation which he had experienced from Madame de Montespan, by redoubling his esteem for the duchess, appeared to have renewed for her all his former friendship.

The delay which the king had obtained from Madame de la Valliere had now nearly expired. But, except Bossuet and the Maréchal de Bellefonds, no one suspected she was on the eve of her departure...... She secretly requested a private audience of the queen, and received permission to attend her on the evening: the duchess, knowing the king would

not

not be at her house that evening, determined to leave it during the night. It was in the month of May, about nine o'clock, that Madame de la Valliere, clothed in a coarse black robe, her face covered with a veil, went on foot to hire a sedan chair, and in this humble equipage was conducted to the palace. On being introduced to the queen, she found that princess alone in her cabinet. The duchess, on her entrance, raised up her veil, and discovered a countenance bathed in tears. She hastily advanced, and, clasping her hands, threw herself at the feet of the queen: "I come," said she, "to implore a generous pardon. . . . . Ah! Madam, do not repulse me! . . . in a few hours I shall be for ever buried in the convent of the Carmelites!" . . . . At these words the queen, deeply affected, raised up and cordially embraced the duchess. "Oh,"

cried Madame de la Valliere, " it is at this moment that I believe myself truly reconciled to virtue !" . . . . As she pronounced these words, the door opened, and the king stood before them.... he remained immoveable, on beholding the duchess in the arms of the queen...... he comprehended she had come to take a last farewel, and he started at the idea..... He saw the victim of his seduction and his inconstancy ready to be buried for ever in the most austere cloister . . . . . . and he beheld her still in all the loveliness of youth*..... The duchess blushed on perceiving the king: her tears, the lively red which coloured her cheeks, the crape veil, and black habit, which displayed to still greater advantage the dazzling whiteness of her complexion, all at this instant

* She was then only twenty eight years of age.

gave

gave to her beauty a supernatural lustre . . . . . . In contemplating her charms, Lewis mistook his astonishment and admiration for remorse. . . . He swore, at the bottom of his soul, never to suffer her to depart. This was to obtain over her a second victory, and self-love had, perhaps, a greater share in this sudden resolution than either tenderness or pity.

Madame de la Valliere had not been able to defend herself against an emotion of joy on beholding the king, which she had hoped never more to experience. She cast on him the most tender and melancholy look, but immediately kissing the hand of the queen, which she pressed against her heart, "Adieu, Madam," said she, in a touching but firm voice—and making a profound obeisance, she departed with precipitation.

The appearance of the king had pro-

produced, in the mind of the duchess, an involuntary feeling, which reason could not surmount: she re-entered the Hotel de Biron about ten o'clock, agitated, trembling, and particularly terrified at an emotion, for which she reproached herself in the most lively manner. She endeavoured to divert her attention by superintending the preparations for her departure. Her women and domestics, acquainted with her determination, obeyed her orders in tears: she heard around her nothing but sighs, and, in order to calm their sorrow, she had frequently to assure them, that she was certain of complete happiness. Her gratitude augmented their regret, and they could only reply to her in sighs and groans. The duchess melted into tears at these expressions of sorrow her fate had produced, secretly pleased, perhaps, at having a pretext for her

tenderness

tenderness and sorrow. At half an hour after ten they heard a carriage enter the court, and the gate was immediately opened! . . . . . " Ah! my God," cried the duchess, turning pale, " you incline yet to subject me to a cruel proof! . . . . . O deign to support my courage!" On pronouncing these words, she arose, by a kind of mechanical motion, as if with an intention of flying; her women immediately left her, and the king was announced! . . . . the duchess fell back into her chair; Lewis advanced . . . . . but it was no longer the cold and indifferent prince; his looks, his manner, his expression, the sound even of his voice, all was changed; every thing recalled to the duchess a time she wished to forget; all retraced the charm to which she had yielded. . . . . . He was affected, suppliant . . . . he had all the delicacy, all the attractive and timid mildness

which is produced by uncertainty and hope.....He began by declaring that he had never consented to a project, the bare idea of which he regarded with horror: he added, that he had expected every thing from her *friendship*, and from her own reflections...... "Leave me," continued he, "abandon me, since you cannot recover that repose on which my happiness depends.....I give you liberty to afflict and render my life unhappy, but I cannot permit you to abridge your own: make choice of another retreat; live far from me, but remain free....." "Ah! could I be able? Is it possible for me to be, at the same time, separated from you, and remain mistress of my actions?...... "Ah! why fly me?" "I have sworn to consummate my sacrifice; I cannot break my oath....." "This oath is void; it is barbarous, it is impious: have

have you then a right to abridge your days? You can never support such a life."..... "Ah! I have supported your change, and still live."...."Ah! have not the cruelty to reproach me with my errors; this moment of grief and terror has sufficiently avenged you!"..... "These austerities, which you dread, have nothing in them painful to me; I am accustomed to them."...."How?"...."Come and convince yourself; deign to follow me." At these words the duchess arose, and taking a key, which hung at her girdle, she opened, with a trembling hand, a small door, and entered, with the king, into a mysterious cabinet, which presented to the eyes of the astonished monarch the melancholy aspect of a Carmelite's cell. The furniture was composed of a coffin for a bed, a straw-bottomed chair, and a table of rough wood, on which was

placed a crucifix, a death's head, a lamp, and the gospels!.....Scarcely had the duchess set her foot into this humble sanctuary of religion, formed by her piety, than she resumed all her fortitude: there now remained of her too tender attachment, only that sensibility which could give a value to her victory, and not the feebleness which could render it doubtful or distressing. "Where have you conducted me?" exclaimed the king, penetrated with the most lively sentiments of grief, of admiration, and of pity...... "What! is it in a place like this that the most interesting of women would pass the remainder of her days! What! would so many charms, so much youth, sweetness, and virtue remain buried in this frightful solitude!....and I have been the cause!.... Will you then, in abandoning me, leave me to the

remorse of having been the most unpitying of tyrants?" .... "Ah!" replied Madame de la Valliere, "cherish not remorse: I am happy, not with that fugitive and fragile felicity which cannot be tasted without trembling, which flies from us with rapidity, never to return, and which leaves a stain on the mind, and fills it with bitter regrets, but with an unalterable and still increasing felicity. Ah! this happiness, so pure, has never yet been defined! The forerunner of celestial joys, like them, it is impossible to be depicted! It can alone produce, at once, all the transports of enthusiasm, and all the satisfaction of perfect tranquillity! .... Who can mistake the essence of divine love in these supernatural effects! it exalts and tranquillizes the soul; it inflames and moderates all its sensations; it fully satisfies it by exciting an ardent

desire, which can never be gratified in this life; it triumphs over nature, by giving a charm to objects the most terrible; it embellishes deserts, annihilates death; nothing presents to it an image of the destruction of our being...... Yes! every thing which surrounds us here, far from inspiring mournful ideas, speaks only of a happy immortality!..... and this coffin, which you view with horror, with what pleasure have I, for more than a year, reposed in it every night! frightful remorse never kept me awake on this couch! I beheld angels surrounding it: I slept sweetly under the shade of their protecting wings, and I enjoyed the most delicious repose!"

Whilst Madame de la Valliere thus spoke, with all the energy such a profound and sublime sentiment could inspire, the king listened with astonishment, and regarded her with a kind

kind of undefinable rapture: never had he, before, found her so beautiful, so noble, and so interesting. "O my angelic friend," cried he, "abandon me not! Remain, to give to the court an example of every virtue; remain to change and purify my heart. You shall be at liberty to live here as in a cloister!.....I solicit from you only fraternal friendship, and I swear to sacrifice to you that sentiment which has disunited us..... Consent to remain near me, and in a quarter of an hour, Madame de Montespan shall receive an order instantly to quit the court, never to return.... Speak but a single word, and I hasten, with transport, to sign the exile of your enemy." At this unexpected offer, the duchess started, and attentively viewing the king—"What," said she, "will you consent to separate yourself for ever from Madame de

de Montespan?" "Ah! can you doubt it," replied the king, "it would cost me nothing in order to preserve you!" "O! my God!" cried the duchess, "it is now that I believe you have at last pardoned me. I can now offer you a worthy sacrifice!......Ah!" continued she, turning her face to the king, bathed in tears, "pray with me! ....that as our hearts were mingled together by a culpable passion, they may be united by virtue in this last farewel!—Of what importance will be to me the recollection of a few moments of mutual tenderness, without a crime, and without weakness! ... Pray with me! ... that I may be able to preserve, even to the grave, this delightful remembrance: *our tears flowed in unison, our souls corresponded together, and darted towards the Almighty!...* O pray with me." She pronounced these

these words with a mild and celestial expression—the king could not restrain his tears: he was standing, and the excess of his tenderness and emotion, obliged him to lean for support against the wall: he covered his face with his hands, and remained in this posture without having the power to reply. The duchess, raising her eyes towards heaven, with the most pathetic expression: "God of goodness," said she, "I confide to you his happiness: may his throne, which he has decorated with all the splendour of earthly glory, be henceforth environed with all the majesty of religion; may his great soul, worthy of knowing you, be elevated to you; may he become the supporter and august defender of our faith: may he perceive, that what is so great, so consoling, and so useful, can never be an illusion! . . . O sovereign Arbiter of our

our destinies, watch over this empire, and over the hero by which it is governed. May the renown of his virtues and of his prosperity reach even to me. May it be the only worldly rumour which can ever interrupt the religious silence of my cell! O may I listen to it always, and I shall have lost nothing, I shall have nothing to regret!"

At the conclusion of this fervent prayer, the duchess remained some moments, with her hands still joined, absorbed in profound meditation. Afterwards, drying her eyes, she arose, approached the king, and said to him, in a firm but enchanting voice: "it is necessary we separate! I leave you my children, and I leave you without inquietude! .... We will henceforth only recal our errors to deplore them; but guard with delight the rapturous remembrance of the sainted

ed friendship which presided at our eternal adieu !" . . . At these last words, Lewis, bathed in tears, threw himself on his knees before her, and seizing one of her hands : " Allow me," said he, in a voice interrupted by sobs, " allow me to render this last homage to the only object I ever loved ! . . . . Ah ! to my eternal misfortune, I have never been able fully to appreciate you until the moment we are about to be separated for ever ! . . . I have no more the right, nor the hope of retaining you ! . . . Celestial love is necessary to your soul ! adieu, fulfil your sublime destiny ! . . . I admire you too much to complain, but I am overwhelmed with sorrow and regret ! . . . Heaven will, doubtless, be in the place you inhabit ; you will carry with you virtue and sensibility, and you will there find repose ! . . . . As for me, deprived of you, I shall be

pursued

pursued by a recollection which will lacerate and oppress my heart: what object will henceforth be able to interest, or give me pleasure!---Adieu, you give up, you renounce every thing, but it is me alone that you immolate!"---On pronouncing these words, the king pressed the hand of the duchess to his lips, after which he darted hastily towards the door, and disappeared!---He rapidly traversed the apartments, holding his handkerchief to his eyes! . . . He stopped at the bottom of the stair-case, struck by the melancholy reflection that he would never again behold this angelic woman, whose destiny he had overthrown. He felt a temptation again to ascend, not with the hope of being able, by new efforts, to overturn her resolution, but only to see her again; to behold once more her mild and amiable countenance.---His carriage, however,

however, drew up, and he determined to depart. He first turned towards the valet-de-chambre, who was in the confidence of the duchess, and who had followed to light him out, and ordered him to come to him in the morning, at the same time declaring his intention of taking him into his service: he added, that pensions should be settled on the duchess's other domestics, and charged him to bring with him a list of the poor whom he knew the duchess had taken under her protection.

After the departure of the king, the duchess, prostrated in her cell, heard his carriage leave the Hotel de Biron, never more to return, and the great gate shut after it!---At this noise, which resounded mournfully to her heart, she interrupted her devotions, exclaiming: " it is then finished! . . . I shall see him again only

in

in eternity! It seems as if the whole universe were annihilated before my eyes!.... Before even leaving the world, it already exists no more for me!... Its pleasures, its illusions, its hopes, all have vanished from my sight!... Truth alone remains!... Whatever be its austerities during the days of our pilgrimage, they are sweet and consoling to those who seek them in sincerity, and embrace them voluntarily. They are only terrifying to irresolute or vicious minds!"..... In pronouncing these words, she fixed her eyes stedfastly on her crucifix, "all human sufferings," said she, "will terminate there!... Yet, a moment, and everlasting peace will succeed to all our sufferings."--- This reflection calmed the agitation of her heart; she remained a few moments silent, with her eyes fixed on her funeral bed. At the aspect of

of this imposing object, her passions were annihilated, or at least became silent. The duchess left her cabinet to give the last orders for her departure. All was ready two hours after midnight: she then went into the apartment of her daughter, who had lived for the two last years at the castle with her governess, but whom she often retained to sleep at her hotel; and, wishing to see her at the moment of her departure, had, with this view, sent for her on the present evening. Mademoiselle de Blois was in a profound sleep; a night lamp burnt in her chamber; the duchess softly approached her; she drew aside the curtain, and regarding this charming girl, she burst into a flood of tears! "Thou wilt awaken to sorrow," said she, "for thou wilt in vain ask for thy mother! . . . She will be in a safe and peaceable asy-

lum, sheltered from all the dangers that surround thy youth. I take refuge in port, and I leave you in the midst of storms! O my daughter, thou wilt know what to fear when I shall paint to you all I have suffered! . . . In this palace I suppressed my tears; I concealed my shame: in my cell, I will open this maternal heart: thou shalt see the deep wounds it has received; thou shalt see that a courageous repentance may cicatrise them, but that nothing can efface the scar! . . . Adieu, dear child. Alas! I ought ever to sigh over thy birth, but God has enjoined me to love and bless thee: he permits me to regret thee: the grief I experience at leaving thee, is not unmixed with satisfaction; at least it is legitimate! . . . Adieu! . . . Would to heaven thou mayest be less sensible and more happy than thy mother!" At these

these words she closed the curtain, and left the chamber, shedding a torrent of tears. She entered into her oratory, and, on her knees, took thence the crystal cross she had formerly received from her mother, the only ornament she inclined to carry with her. She then gave in charge, to her confidential valet de chambre, the sum she had destined to the poor, and to several of them she left annuities for life. She left also, with letters written by her own hand, some diamonds which she had disposed of in favour of her intimate friends. After having herself executed this species of testament, she went into her saloon, where, by her order, all her domestics were assembled. She demanded pardon for the offence she had given to them, and delivered the most affecting religious exhortation. In the fulfilment of all these

these duties, she found her strength of mind progressively re-animated: she embraced her weeping women, and, tearing herself from their arms, departed with a firm step, saying: "Thanks be to heaven, I am now delivered from all the trifling cares which fortune can raise up, and of which death can despoil us. I recover at last the peace of my soul, which can never more be ravished from me!"... Her emotion, however, in some degree, returned on ascending the carriage. Her domestics had followed her even to the bottom of the staircase: their tears and their cries affected her.—She made a sign for the coachman to depart: he obeyed, and in passing the threshold of her gate, a crowd of confused recollections oppressed her heart. She dissipated these unwelcome intruders, and fixing her thoughts on her daughter, her

her tears again began to flow.—On entering the avenue to Paris, she started on perceiving the castle, but quickly turning away her eyes, she lowered the window-blind on that side. —The duchess was alone in a hired berline, drawn by two horses, and followed by a domestic without livery: she carried with her nothing from the magnificent hotel she had abandoned, except her coffin, which she intended to place in her cell: it was wrapt up in a cover, and fixed behind the carriage, like a trunk. After having travelled about an hour, Madame de la Valliere cast her eyes around the country; she admired the freshness of the verdure, and the beauty of the trees and flowers, and she was much affected by the prospect. She sighed: it was an adieu to the fields, to the smiling hillocks, and to all nature!—She raised her

eyes to heaven: "It is there," said she, "that I ought to fix my attention! there, henceforth, to direct all my wishes! this mortal body will be no more but a shade on the earth; my soul, aggrandized, exalted, and detached from earthly cares, in order to enjoy, before the time, its divine nature and its immortality! It bursts the ties by which it is captivated; it leaps over the space that separates it from God; it darts into his bosom, and reposes there; faith unfolds to it every thing that supreme mercy will bestow in eternity, and his goodness already gives to it the most precious of all his benefits, the privilege of loving God without measure!" These reflections fortified her mind, and elevated her above herself; she arrived at the monastery of the Carmelites, about six o'clock in the morning; when

when the superior, at the head of the community, came to receive her at the gate of the convent. Madame de la Valliere threw herself at her feet, saying: "*My mother, I have always abused my liberty, I now resign it into your hands for ever.*" They first conducted her into the church; on coming out of which, they cut off her fine long hair, which she sent to her children.

The proofs usually required before entering on one's noviciate, were abridged in favour of her zeal, and she chose to assume the novice's veil the third week after Pentecost, which was this year (1674) on the second of June, a day on which the church delivers to the faithful the parable of the passover, which carries on its shoulders the sins of the flock. This was the text from which the bishop of Aire preached a sermon on this

occasion; Bossuet and Bourdaloue being absent. Madame de la Valliere took the affecting name of *Sister Louisa, of the order Miséricordia.* During the year of her noviciate, Madame de la Valliere, by her piety, her fervour, and her profound humility, astonished even the nuns. The pious Carmelites proposed her among themselves, as the model of the most perfect penitence.

On the fourth of June, the following year, Madame de la Valliere pronounced her vows. With the exception of the king, and Madame de Montespan, all the court repaired to the convent of the Carmelites, in order to assist at this solemn ceremony, the remembrance of which has been immortalized by the eloquent discourse of Bossuet. The illustrious penitent displayed herself for the last time; it was impossible any longer to

to envy or hate her; she was seen by all present, with admiration, such as she really was, beautiful, modest, courageous: never had her figure appeared so affecting, and so noble; her countenance, full of beauty and sweetness, had assumed all the serenity of innocence, all the dignity of virtue. The queen herself presented her with the black veil, which Madame de la Valliere received on her knees; it was only at that instant, she timidly raised her eyes towards the queen; her suppliant look seemed still to implore the pardon she had already received. The queen embraced her with the most tender expression; when Madame de la Valliere respectfully bowed her head, and sweet tears escaped from her eyes!—Every heart was keenly affected!—This emotion still increased: Bossuet spoke!——

After the ceremony, the queen entered

tered into the convent of the Carmelites, and remained near half an hour shut up with Madame de la Valliere: on her departure, she promised frequently to return, an engagement which she faithfully performed until the day of her death.

Madame de la Valliere, wholly devoted to God, appeared to conduct herself with so little effort, that, in the midst of all her austerities, she seemed to have assumed her original character, and to follow her natural inclinations. With her peace of mind, she recovered perfect health; and, notwithstanding the delicacy of her constitution, lived thirty years in this monastery. Cherished and revered by her daughter, become princess of Conti, she terminated her life in her arms. Her death presented a sublime spectacle, her purified soul was disunited from her mortal part without

a struggle,

a struggle, in order to receive the glorious reward of her generous sacrifice, and her long repentance.

THE END.

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